

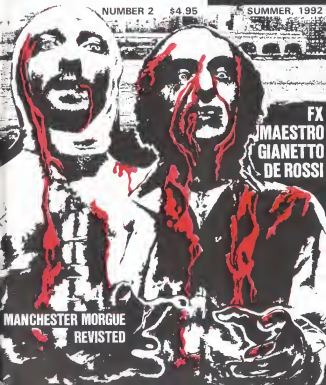
DEEP RED

A · L · E · R · T

NUMBER 2 \$4.95

SUMMER, 1992

ULTIMATE FULCI
NEW INTERVIEW!
DYLAN DOG
HORROR FEST
SOAVI SPEAKS
THE LAST GORE FILM?



FX
MAESTRO
GIANETTO
DE ROSSI

MANCHESTER MORGUE
REVISTED

NUMBER 2 SUMMER 1992

COVER: *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie*

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DEEP RED
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PIECE O' MIND

KING OF THE PARTY DOGS

BY CHAS BALUN

The first tangible evidence that the Dylan Dog Horror Fest was something very special came about quite early in the trip. Before we even got on the plane, actually. After handing our tickets and passports over to the Alitalia agent at Los Angeles International Airport, we were instructed to proceed upstairs, to the VIP lounge and wait for the boarding call. Hey, OK; this is beginning to look trèscool - like rock star stuff or somethin'. Suspicions confirmed as we open the door to the lounge. Greeted pleasantly by a multi-lingual hostess, we were invited to make ourselves comfortable until our flight was announced. Well then, we ought to be *real* comfortable by then, seeing as we got to LAX a full 2 1/2 hours early! Didn't want to miss a single minute of this, no sirree! The hostess

then practically insisted that we avail ourselves of the well-stocked bar and begin scarfing down the assorted munchie platters piled high and placed at strategic locations throughout the room. And since we were the only ones in the lounge, we figured it was high time to get on with it. Soon, Mr. Daniels (Jack, that is) and your REDitor were deep in conversation as the cookie, peanut and cracker wrappers began to pile up around us. The missus cautioned me, suggesting that I pace myself; after all, we were still a good two hours away from embarking on a non-stop, eleven-hour flight. I could definitely see the sense in that, but hey! How often is this gonna happen? Quickly citing Maxim #17 from Balun's Code of Personal Conduct ("*Anything worth doing is worth overdoing*"), I made my point - surely and succinctly. Mr. Daniels agreed, so we had a majority.

It wasn't long before others began to invade our little hedonistic playground, but they were somehow . . . different. All of them were impeccably groomed and dressed; spoke perfect Italian and drank only bottled mineral water from the bar (Can you imagine?) so I knew right away they weren't part of our contingent. Soon enough, a few gringos appeared who did look like they were going with us. Turns out that one of 'em was Tony Randel, the director of *Hellraiser 2*





and Fangoria's *Children of the Night*. Mr. Daniels reminded me that although I had previously opined that both films sucked yak wazoo, it was altogether inappropriate at this time to rain on anybody's parade. After all, Mr. Randel was on his way to Milan, Italy, with us, to premiere his newest film, *Amityville 9 . . . uh, '92*. Give him a break, for Chrissakes; we hadn't even got on the plane yet. No need for shit-lists just yet. So, we talked about the weather and the Lakers (some local sports outfit, I guess).

More folks began streaming into the lounge now and I began to circle around, hoping that Randel would be slow to remember my nasty carping about his *Chumps O' the Night*



screening at the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror a couple of months back. My wife gave me a sly wink; dutifully noting my courageous act of diplomacy and restraint. I vowed then not to be the Ugly American on my very first trip abroad - and, I almost kept that promise.

LATER THAT SAME EVENING

OK. We've eaten twice; had innumerable snacks, drinks and desserts; watched two movies; studied our E-Z Italian booklet from cover to cover; finished that thick, pesky novel; played 23 hands of poker . . . and we still had five hours to go! Yipes! My butt was already beginning to biodegrade into the seat and the stewardess was threatening to show another Goldie Hawn movie! Mercifully, consciousness slowly ebbed away as I counted cannibals jumping over a fence and chasing John Morghen.

MILANO, ITALY - THURS. 1530 HOURS . . .

We were picked up at the airport by Loris Curci, one of the festival's artistic directors (and newest DEEP RED staff writer) and driven to the host hotel, the Principe di Savoia. Shit! This joint would give the *Dynasty* denizens wet dreams! Acres of inlaid marble, stained glass, exotic wood-working, humongous chandeliers and lots of guys in long coats, caps and gloves pretending to be nice to you. Our room was just your typical \$500-a-night (Yeah, we checked; couldn't believe it either) crash pad, so once again, we were reminded that this was to be one extraordinary gig. The following eight nights were to prove,

beyond a shadow of a doubt, that these Dogsters really knew how to throw a party.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN . . .

The first Dylan Dog Horror Fest was held in 1987; this one was to be the third in an ongoing series. The festival is an offshoot from one of the most popular comic books in Italy (sales just under 1 million copies a month!) whose hero battles a plethora of monsters, mummies, werewolves and space aliens on a very regular basis. Editor and comic book writer Sergio Bonelli was the festival's official host, and he spared no expense in making this one of the most impressive celebrations of the horror film ever seen on any coast at any time. This man loves comics, monsters and movies with a sweet and honest passion rarely seen in a world that seems to have lost its sense of imagination. He has become wealthy, successful and respected businessman but has never forgotten his fascination for all things wild and wonderful. His love for the horror film is far too grand to contain, as is his unending generosity. For eight solid nights, he invited the people of Milan to come and party with him - and, he did it for FREE!

The huge sports/concert arena, the Palatrussardi, was chosen as the site for this 1992 edition of the Dylan Dog Horror Fest. Seating was arranged to accommodate over 5,000 people a night, and a specially designed, custom screen and sound system were installed in the weeks prior to opening night. The huge screen was decorated by FX artist Sergio (*Demons*, *The Church*) Stivalenti with dozens of alien worm-creatures that slithered up, around and through both the screen and stage. There were two additional screens for video displays and subtitles (almost every film was





in English). The stage area was lit just like an Argento movie and a video film crew was there to record the on-site action. Though many of the titles screened had already seen the light of a Stateside projector, one must remember that it's not unusual for some six months to a year to elapse before the film would appear on the foreign marketplace. Despite this somewhat arbitrary time frame, several films including *Children of the Corn 2* (I know what you're thinking, but you're wrong! Believe it or eat it), *Amityville '92* and *Hellraiser 3: Hell On Earth* were bonafide world premieres at this year's fest.

American directors were well represented as Wes Craven introduced *La Casa Nera* (*The Black House*, aka *The People Under the Stairs*); Frank Henenlotter dropped *Basket Case 3: The Progeny* into our laps, and Brian Yuzna unleashed *Mutronics* (aka *The Geyser*). Directors Tony Randel and David F. Price hosted screenings of *Amityville '92* and *Children of the Corn 2*, respectively, and Robert Englund introduced his *Phantom of the Opera*. Englund is still a mighty hot ticket in Italy (even though foreign prints of the *Nightmare* films use a different Freddy voice) and was mobbed after his speech by shrieking fans clutching Freddy dolls, masks, gloves and sweaters. Bruce Campbell (one very popular dude) spoke 'n' joked before introducing *Mindwarp*

and the teaser trailer for *Army of Darkness*; and Ted Raimi followed with an analysis of the Freudian subtext of his new film, *Lunatics: A Love Story*. Other screenings included: Larry Cohen's *The Ambulance*; Stuart Gordon's *The Pit* and *the Pendulum* (one of the two films dubbed into Italian); Dan O'Bannon's *The Resurrected*; Jim Wynorski's *976-Evil 2*; Fangoria's *Severed Ties* and *Children of the Night*; Steve Miner's *Warlock* and Shinya (*Tetsuo*) Tsukamoto's supremely weird *Hiruko the Goblin*.

On the final night of the festival, producer Lawrence Mortoff screened a work-in-progress print of *Hellraiser 3*, accompanied by a special digitally-enhanced Ultra Stereo soundtrack that was so loud it peeled the paint right off the walls. The Italian fans proved themselves a real screener's dream - applauding, stomping, shouting and whistling at just the slightest hint of splatter, special effects, monsters or naked female flesh. (Especially the latter; don't forget now, this is the country with a Pope.)

Running concurrently with the festival was a nifty, multi-media exhibit in downtown Milan that traced the evolution of horror in books, comics and film, highlighted by Sergio Stivaletti's FX work previously seen in such films as *Demons 2* and *The Church*.

Despite all the pleasant diversions, some of us still had a job to do. Your REDditor got interviewed by European MTV; did a 2 a.m. radio talk show gig with Robert Englund; and participated in various round table discussions filmed by a British video crew.

Regardless of the enormity of the whole affair, in some ways, it was the

smaller details that really helped define the essence of the festival. These moments included: the camaraderie found nightly at the Cafe Milano where we celebrated the day's events; the long-winded but consistently side-splitting anecdotal assault from Robert England; the good-natured and crowd-pleasing pratfalls of Bruce Campbell and Ted Raimi; and the sight of Frank Henenlotter skipping joyfully down a rain-slicked street at 3:30 in the morning clutching his two bags full of Jess Franco and Joe D'Amato videos. All these things are destined to become fond remembrances of the highest order; buried deeper in the brain pan than a psycho-killer's double-edged axe.

The Dylan Dog Horror Fest was a little like being at a Woodstock for the Splatter Generation. The good times will never be forgotten; the new friends forever cherished, and the memories will help fuel a thousand dreams to come.

Arriverdecì, Milano!

- Chas. Balun
Summer, 1992

Deepest, redder thanks to: Sergio Bonelli, Loris and Mary Curci, Stefano Marzorati, Michele Guaschino and Martin Hemingway. My world has become a much better place for having met you.





GIANETTO DE ROSSI FX MASTER DIRECTS!

**EXCLUSIVE
DEEP RED INTERVIEW**

*By Loris Curci
Special Collaboration:
Antonio Tentori*

DEEP RED: How did you originally get involved in filmmaking?

GdR: Well, I guess it all started with my grandfather, back in 1908. He was an authentic filmmaker, he used to produce, direct and star in all his films. The day he decided he was too old to continue, my dad took over. So you see, it was quite a natural thing for me to enter the glittering world of movies. I started 31 years ago and have worked on 113 films so far

DEEP RED: Wow, that's a record!

GdR: Yeah, and the one I'm preparing now is the third film as a director.

DEEP RED: The first two were *Killer Crocodile II* and *Cyborg*

GdR: Exactly. The former is a sequel I guess no one cared about. On the other hand, *Cyborg* was one movie I really wanted to make, but the producer was expecting a horror film, and I shot a sci-fi spoof instead. The effects weren't bad, the actors were (laughs)

DEEP RED: What made you decide you were going to become an FX man in the first place?

GdR: I was very good at drawing and modeling, when I was in school. I remember I used to try the most difficult things just for the thrill of it. That is the point: you need stimulation when working on special effects. I like to be challenged and I am never satisfied with myself. I want to prove my skills in many, different fields.

DEEP RED: Your name is tied to Lucio Fulci's best works. Did you expect you were going to achieve cult status with those three films (*Zombie*, *The Beyond*, *City of the Walking Dead*)?

GdR: You know, I like to think that part of the following *Zombie* got is because of the effects. In filmmaking everybody is important, but no one is indispensable. The guy who considers himself indispensable is a real jerk, and I know many . . . Anyway, going back to *Zombie*, the producer wanted to copy Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. The script was a mess, so Fulci and I thought the only way we could impress our audience was by giving

"Fulci and I thought that the only way we could impress our audience was by giving them scary zombies."

them scary zombies. We were right. Our living dead were a lot different from Romero's. His were pale and bluish, because, when you elucidate the skin of someone with a tan, you get this very bright blue, which clearly shows on screen. And I don't like it.

So we used clay and pottery for the faces. The extras would come over in the morning and we'd cover them

with the special mixture. At the end of the day they really were in need of a shower. And then I remember it was so hot . . . I can't blame them for hating us (laughs). Both Lucio and me used to refer to them as walking flower pots (laughs).

DEEP RED: Word is that Bertolucci was pretty much impressed by your work on *Zombie* . .

GdR: Bernardo is a very nice person. He was always kind and understanding when we worked on *Novecento*. We has this beautiful sequence where this guy cuts off this enormous tit of a cow, with blood splashing all over the place. Of course, the tit was made with latex, but the scene was pretty impressive. There was another great sequence I worked on; the one with Donald Sutherland getting killed in what I consider a good splatter effect.

All in all, I am deeply proud of the work I did on *Novecento*, and Bertolucci is a marvelous director.

DEEP RED: What's the real story behind *Dune*?

GdR: Oh, that. You wanna hear it?

DEEP RED: Please . . .

GdR: Okay, you might want to know that I had a very hard time on *Dune*. I was assistant to Carlo Rambaldi. I worked on the Navigator, which David liked a lot, and did some minor stuff, like make-up and everything . .

DEEP RED: The worms were terrible . . .

GdR: Yeah, they were big chunks of plastic with no life whatsoever. I was not involved with the worms! Rambaldi does beautiful things sometimes, and sometimes his work is not very good. When I saw the dailies of *King Kong Lives* (the producers wanted me to make a beauty queen out of Linda Hamilton!), my

feeling was that they were really ruining the film with those cheap gorilla costumes. They were so fake . .

"Zombie is a good one though, and *The Beyond* had some very good effects. Fellini's *Casanova* is another of the things I did best."

Carlo told me he was given very little time to work on the costumes, and that they were running short on budget. Nevertheless, the results were not as successful as the first *King Kong*, but then Rambaldi had Rick Baker in the team, so I guess that, in part, explains the difference. As for *Dune*, the film should have run the original four hours Lynch conceived. And in that case, you would have seen another movie altogether. The worms were no good, working in the desert was terrible but Lynch is a wonderful director, and the actors were so brilliant! It's a pity they de-

cided to cut it down to two hours.

DEEP RED: Have you seen anything particularly stimulating lately?

GdR: Well, *Terminator 2* was terrific. I didn't like some of the effects of the original *Terminator*, but the film was much better than the sequel. On the other hand, *T2* had wonderful computer graphic and marvelous FX.

DEEP RED: You have worked with James Cameron at the beginning of his career . . .

GdR: Yes, we were together on *Piranha II*. Cameron was fired by producer Ovidio Assonitis. Funny, isn't it? The guy is so rich now . . . Assonitis, like most producers who have some knowledge on directing, was expecting something totally different from Cameron. He was not satisfied so one day he just took over and completed the film. I shot a couple of sequences too, and the monsters weren't so bad. Just another B-movie though . . .

DEEP RED: What is it that makes a B-movie successful?

GdR: Most of the people involved in film business refer to horror films



as B-movies, which is fundamentally correct, but sometimes you have these low-budget flicks that look so good, and are so well done, they deserve a capital A. A couple of the *Nightmare On Elm Street* episodes are very professional, for example. You can't call them B movies! The camerawork is brilliant and they have good scripts. And what about those films, say *Halloween*, that raise so much money? Are we still talking about B movies? Once a film does more than 40 million dollars there's no B movie crap to fuss about.

"I like to be challenged and I am never satisfied with myself."

DEEP RED: What is your opinion on Italian genre directors?

GdR: Dario Argento's earlier works, the giallos, and most of all *Suspiria* and *Inferno*, were authentic masterpieces. The guy was a genius! Now I don't like his recent stuff: *Opera* was disconcerting. It's hard to understand what he's up to! The situation in Italy is simply dramatic. Fulci doesn't produce good stuff any more and it is my belief that we (Italians) should reconsider our principles in terms of horror films. We are definitely surpassed . .

DEEP RED: Did *Killer Crocodile II* and *Cyborg* live up to your expectations? In other words, are those the movies you wanted to make?

GdR: Most important of all, I learned something from them . . . I wanted to verify if I could ever be able to direct a movie. I made the monster, a very cheap one, for *Crocodile*, and then the producer asked me if I wanted to direct the sequel. We had a small

crew, an even smaller budget and less than four weeks, which isn't much. It couldn't have turned out well, no way . . . I was offended by the way I was treated. I wanted to make a serious movie, but the company I signed for didn't give a shit. The monster itself wasn't all that bad, but it just couldn't work with the money they gave us.

When I was offered *Cyborg*, Fabrizio De Angelis (the producer) was expecting something else from me. He was trying to sell a film which was completely different from the one I was making. It just couldn't work . . . I'm not going to say that he molested my creativity, because he is usually very good at what he does, but I swear I am never going to work in those conditions again.

DEEP RED: You mean there is nothing worth saving from both *Cyborg* and *Killer Crocodile II*?

GdR: Well, maybe there is something. But I am very severe with myself, and seldom satisfied with the things I do. *Zombie* is a good one though, and *The Beyond* had some very good effects. Fellini's *Casanova* is another of the things I did best.

DEEP RED: Is there any film in particular that you would have loved to direct?

GdR: That's a good one . . . Probably *The Elephant Man*. I love David Lynch, all of his stuff, but this one

" . . . we (Italians) should reconsider our principles in terms of horror films. We are definitely surpassed . "

combines drama and fiction in such a fascinating manner . . . He knows how to deal with actors like no one else. *Star Wars* is maybe another of those films I will always love, although it lacks logic and I didn't agree on the choice of all those puppets playing fake instruments. It's pretty grotesque . . .

DEEP RED: I know you're working on a very big project right now, can you tell the readers of *Deep Red* something about it?

GdR: I can't give you the title of the movie because of contractual rights, so let's just call it "T" for now, okay? You're the first journalist I'm telling this, so please forgive me if I sound conspirative, this is supposed to be secret . . .

I wrote and directed this modern fable that deals on the relation between mother and child. The main characters are creatures who have to fight human arrogance and stupidity. It was extremely difficult to work with "stars" covered in latex and prosthetics, and make them look credible. I have to thank producer Claudio Bonivento who gave me the possibility to make this film. He is an extraordinary independent producer.

"Yes, we were together on *Piranha II*. Cameron was fired by producer Ovidio Assonitis. Funny, isn't it?"

DEEP RED: Bonivento is quite popular for having launched 16 young directors in the last few years. How did you get to meet him?

"I wrote and directed this modern fable. The main characters are creatures who have to fight human arrogance and stupidity."

GdR: He is trying to fight Bertolucci's monopoly in the Italian film industry, so he is mostly interested in original ideas. We were working on *The Projectionist* (a European film starring Tom Hulce) and one day I went to him with a drawing and a three-page script. Nothing else It took him less than five minutes to understand what the story was all about, he liked the monster and said "Go ahead, you direct it and I'll furnish all the money you need." Now, "T" is going to cost more than ten million dollars and maybe, in the end, we might be spending some more money on it . . . Please note that no Italian sci-fi adventure film has ever cost so much.

"T" was shot in Brazil and in the States with an all-American cast. It should be released in December with world-wide distribution. My only concern is that if this film turns out to be a winner, how can I ever go back and work on low budget horror flicks?



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HOUSE OF THE LIVING DEAD

BLOOD & GORE LASER STYLE

By Damian Pring

Did you know that less than 1% of the people who will read this article own a laserdisc player? Personally, I find that news disconcerting. Laserdisc players don't cost much more (and sometimes less) than a stereo VCR. An average player will cost you somewhere between four to five hundred dollars, while an extravagant one will cost anywhere from six hundred into the thousands. How much you spend depends on how much you've got and how addicted you are to discs. Personally, I own a Pioneer CLD-2080 which I got at an extremely low price of \$450, and it's worth every penny. It is my understanding that those who really love movies and don't own a laserdisc player are too afraid to buy one because they don't know the facts.

Laserdiscs have a whopping 60% sharper image than video. It's amazing to watch a movie that you've seen twenty times or so on video and never notice certain things lurking in the shadows or the color of somebody's eyes; while one view of a laserdisc and you'll see all that and more. If a movie was recorded with stereo, ultra-stereo, stereo-surround sound, etc., laserdiscs bring it out like a bat-out-of-hell. Sometimes you'll hear shit that you've never heard in the theater. Most discs are chapter encoded. This means you can forward to certain scenes or highlights within seconds. Certain discs come in two different formats, CLV (Constant Linear Velocity) and CAV (Constant Angular Velocity). Both formats have the same picture quality but only with the CAV format can you go frame by frame, slow motion, forward motion, etc. CLV discs can fit up to an hour of programming on each side, CAV cuts that time in half allowing only a half hour to each side of the disc. This is the reason CAV discs cost more. Most widescreen films are now being released in their own original ration (or close to it), this is also known as letterboxing. Pan and scan is almost the Golden Rule of video but because laserdiscs are thought to be for the film connoisseurs they are almost always released in their original wide format.

The majority of lasers released in America are for the mainstream audience, though occasionally films like *Santa Sangre* and *The Devil's Daughter* (a.k.a. *The Sect*) slip through courtesy of Republic Video. Image Entertainment is probably

UNSPEAKABLE TERROR!



America's leader when it comes to horror on disc. With one trip to your local dealer (laser, that is), you can expect to pick up copies - and primo ones at that, of *Eyes Without A Face*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *Hardware*, *Bad Taste*, *Bride of Re-Animator*, *Suspiria* - letterboxed, *Lust for A Vampire*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Scanners 2* - the list is seemingly endless. You can even get *Last House On the Left* for crying out loud, all courtesy of Image.

Warner Brothers is getting on the ball with awesome prints of *The Shining*, *A Clockwork Orange* - letterboxed, *Gremlins 1* and *2* - letterboxed, *Altered States*, *The Lost Boys* - letterboxed, and Hammer's *The Mummy* and *Horror of Dracula*. A little note about *Horror of Dracula*; although the disc may be better looking than the tape, it is missing one gore scene at the end of side one which is intact on videocassette.

MCA has been kind enough to release incredible letterboxed copies of both Carpenter's *The Thing* and Hooper's *The Funhouse*.

Paramount's letterboxed *Body Parts* and Cannon Video's *The Borrower* are two inexpensive discs well worth checking out.

CBS/Fox's \$100 release of *Aliens* - letterboxed is definitely for die-hard fans of the movie only. It is extremely grainy and murky. This is by no means the disc's fault but of the film stock used. All the same, it still looks like shit. The disc is presented in a CAV format and includes several never before seen scenes as well. An exhaustive supplementary section is reserved for those who have nothing better to do with their time.

Probably the oddest release of the year is Voyager's Criterion Collection release of *Carrie*. If you like the

film, I suppose it's worth the \$90 it costs, but for the life of me I can't figure out why such a prestigious laser company would pick *Carrie* for their first horror release.

Well, except for the unfinished lists above and a few other releases there isn't much more to say, as far as American discs go, that is.

If it's Argento, Fulci, Woo, Bava or any other director's film of that ilk, then it's time to turn to those ever-so-crafty Japanese. You'll hear no Jap-bashing from me when it comes to comparing their discs to ours, no siree. The Japanese have without a doubt released the most mouth-watering, eye-popping, to-die-for horror discs ever to grace this viewer's eyes.

No self-respecting gorehound should have to live without titles like *Zombie*, *The Killer*, *Supernatural Beast City*, *Deep Red*, *The Beyond*, *Cannibal Apocalypse* and *Holocaust*, *Don't Open the Window*, *The Wandering Kid*, *Black Sunday*, the *Better Tomorrow* series, *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, and anything else that has gore shooting out its swollen ass. Not only are these titles great, but they are uncut and letterboxed. SPLAT! I left out uncensored because the Japs have got a thing against pubic hair, thus optically blurring out the triangle of love whenever it mysteriously appears.

There are two big drawbacks to Japanese discs (I knew it sounded too good): *obtaining* them and *paying* for them. Even if you've prepaid for a disc, you could wind up waiting for months and sometimes over a year to get it. Most discs can cost you a small fortune. Example: *The Terminator* - letterboxed costs about \$30, while a Japanese laserdisc copy of *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein*, also

letterboxed, will cost you anywhere from \$70 to over \$100 - easy. Shop around before you give away your cash. But don't shop too long, because discs disappear faster than you can say "Lucio Fulci is a feisty of geezer."

Earlier, I mention the word "addicted." I think that's the best word to describe a disc collector, because you always want more and you always want the best. But most of all, you want it quick (kinda like pizza, y'know?). Friends and family tend to pick on the advanced disc collector by complaining how much they spend on discs; this can be terminated by one of two ways, or both if you so desire. Comeback Number One: "I could be buying drugs instead." Comeback Number Two: "Puck off!" Either way they both almost always work. Viva laser!

The following is a helpful mail-order list that I highly recommend. Also, if you're lucky enough to live by a Tower Records/Video, be sure to

stop in. Tower has an impressive variety of discs sure to please any laser freak.

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LUNCH AT MANCHESTER MORGUE

By Joe Randazzo

Zombie time! Parents being devoured by the children that sprung from their very loins... ooh, and how about when our protagonist finally locates their beloved, only to be freed of several of their vital organs for their pains! The mind reels.

I recall, years ago, attending one of those "Don't bills" at Orange County's beloved Highway-39 Drive-In. You know, *Don't Look In the Basement*, *Don't Answer the Phone*, *Don't Leave the Toilet Seat Up*, etc. The standout of those films was Jorge Grau's *Don't Open the Window*. Of course, to achieve an "R" rating it was shorn of all the squishy stuff, but the downright snottiness of its characters and the sight of the walking dead made it a favorite nonetheless.

I had been enjoying an uncut Spanish subtitled cassette entitled *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie*, but through the haze of generation-loss I wasn't seeing much more of the red stuff. So I took a second mortgage on the home and laid out the funds for the Japanese laserdisc. The result was perfection, uncut and letterboxed (not to lose any of those subtle, syrupy nuances).

A short while ago, while perusing the "new release" section of a local video emporium, I stumbled across a cassette with a remarkably familiar cast. Although the box is emblazoned with the title *The Living Dead*, the A.D.D. Video release carries a cool little animated title sequence that sports the title *Living Dead at the Manchester Morgue*. The cassette itself suffers from poor video quality and seems to be the victim of a seemingly intentional darkening effect. During the night sequences one seems to view the film from Jose Pelliciano's



viewpoint. This appears to be roughly the same version I viewed at the drive-in (no gore), but I suspect it to be a poor transfer-conversion of a European release, the Japanese-import remains definitive.

The film itself is known under a bounty of alternative titles: *No Profanar El Sueno de los Muertos*, *Non Sio Deve Profanare il Sonno dei Morti*, *Fin de Semana Para los Muertos*, *Breakfast at the Manchester Morgue*, *Breakfast with the Dead* and *The Living Dead* Mellencamp.

With only one other genre effort under his belt, the excellent *Cermonia Sangrieta* (a.k.a. *The Female Butcher* and *The Legend of Blood Castle*, again among others,) director Grau shot *Manchester Morgue* in 1974. A Spanish - Italian co-production, apparently shot in English with exteriors shot in England's lake district - interiors in Madrid (Grau must have some travel agent). And, most important of all, this film features the then-budding talents of Italian FX maestro Gianetto de Rossi, displaying some of his finest work.

The primary characters meet when George, (Ray Lovelock, looking like Jesus in large leather lapels) a snotty, arrogant, dealer of religious antiquities has his motorcycle erroneously backed into by Edna (Christine Galbo, nice boots). Edna is trying to get to her sister's house before her brother-in-law commits his wife to the "Keith Richards" wing of the local South Gate Hospital. They never do get to Manchester. Hampered by the fact that it will take days to repair the bike, George elects Edna to deliver him to his destination. With George behind the wheel they proceed to grind her transmission across the English countryside.



Realizing they may be lost, George treks off alone on foot to the nearest homestead to ask directions. He discovers men from The Ministry of Agriculture testing a new pest-control device which operates with "ultra-sonic radiation." "Not a chemical involved." Designed to drive the insects mad and to ultimately devour each other. It is also apparently has the same effect on the recently dead. In view of how Grau's governmental bug-zapper works, one would be led to believe that this is gonna be a dry, politically correct affair. Not so, the director handles the grau with no apologies. As a result the film's political undercurrents do betray themselves. But what do you want? Vegetarian zombies?

While back at the car, Edna encounters and eludes her first zombie - Guthrie the looney. Only to have Guthrie later strangle her brother-in-law, Martin. Enter bitter, repugnant, bug-up-his-ass police Sergeant McCormick (Arthur Kennedy of *The Sentinel* and *Fantastic Voyage* fame). Learning that Guthrie has been dead for days, George takes Edna to the cemetery to prove to her that he's still interred (bad move). McCormick sends an officer to follow them. Entering the crypt and finding Guthrie's coffin empty, they are confronted by its former resident. By rubbing blood on the eyelids of other recently dead, Guthrie is able to produce a cool little zombie hoard to prevent the tailing officer from rescuing George and

Edna. Poor little Constable Craig is attacked with gut-slurping fervor of Cass Elliott at a Las Vegas buffet table.

The big rumor surrounding this particular sequence is that while one of the diners is enjoying a tidbit, she reaches down and plunks out the officer's eyeball. In the four different versions of the film that I have viewed, two contain the "reach" but none contain the actual "plunk." It is said that zombie-czar Lucio Fulci hired FX man de Rossi for his future efforts based on the strength of this particular scene. Does it actually exist? It's probably collecting dust on a shelf somewhere in Europe, next to the missing piranha footage from *Cannibal Holocaust*.

Anyway, during the commotion our heroes escape. McCormick arrives shortly thereafter. Shocked to find the grisly remains, the sarge determines that George and Edna are drug-crazy Satanists. She's admitted to the hospital for her increasingly hysterical behavior. George is arrested, but conveniently dodges the cops and makes his way to the hospital. In the hospital morgue, the recently re-animated Martin awakens one of the film's more lasting images. A fresh stiff from an autopsy performed at the famous Manchester Morgue. This guy sports little more than a few strategically placed bandages. His torso appears to have been opened from groin to throat by an oversized spam key and sewn back together in order to avoid losing any Stove Top Stuffing. He joins Martin and another dead dude in a late-night snack of fresh orderly and moonlight tour of the hospital.

Making a quick stop at the switchboard, our living dead amigos com-

mit one of the film's most unforgettable bits of nastiness. Sneaking up behind the oblivious, gossiping operator, they pull a full-frontal Umberto Lenzi. Simultaneously tearing off her left breast and relieving her of her digestive tract. Effectively reducing the poor soul to little more than government cheese. The trio then confronts Edna's sister and doctor. Grabbing a handy fire-ax the Doc whacks off Mr. Autopsy's right nipple! Who returns the ax, blade first, to the Doc's head. Fwunk! We are then treated to a gurgling red fissure, just like in Hawaii.

George arrives at the hospital in the midst of the mayhem. Locating the ex-doctor's ax, he wraps the blade in alcohol soaked cotton and sets it ablaze. Endowing him with a combination scorchin' and choppin' action, just like MacGuyver. He flambés Mr. Autopsy and gallops upstairs in true Errol Flynn fashion. Edna's newly zombified sister, and the rest of the stooges, accost Edna in her room. George makes his torch wielding entrance a few seconds later, but not before Edna is stabbed a few times. Our hero incinerates the zombies and drags Edna from the room. As he gazes into her eyes, she goes for his throat. Just like a good zombie should. To save his own life, George shoves Edna back into the flames. Only to be suddenly shot several times by the ever inconvenient Sergeant McCormick. "I wish the dead could come back to life you bastard, because then I could kill you again," vomits Sergeant Attitude.

Content that he's done his humanitarian deed for the day, the Sergeant retires to the hotel where he is ambushed by the recently-radiated and re-animated George, and is merci-

lessly asphyxiated. Amen. The film ends on an ominous shot of the contraption that started the whole sticky wicket to begin with. The irony is, Grau intends the film to end on an apocalyptic note. Yet I'm always left with the notion that some young rocket scientist is gonna sashay on by, identify the machine as the problem, and pull the damn plug.

Back in '68 when Mr. Romero opened the flesh-eating floodgates, he probably had no idea that those lovable Spanish and Italian opportunists would be there to supply fervent gorehounds with their dose of other people's blood. *Manchester Morgue* remains closer to the Romero

spirit than Signor Fulci's. It appears that whenever zombies travel to Europe, their films seem to lose coherency. This cinematic opus is definitely an exception.

Though somewhat naive in its intent, *Manchester Morgue* proves to be a rollicking good time. It amazes me that so few people I've questioned about the film have actually seen it. It deserves to be re-discovered, but the new domestic release is most certainly not the way to do it. So do something special for yourself, seek out the uncut version, be an individual - the rest of the world can listen to Garth Brooks.

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SHATTERING THE MIND'S EYE THE UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO LUCIO FULCI

By David Quinn

Originally this article was to be subtitled, "The Films of Lucio Fulci." After spending the last six months gathering up twenty-one Fulci films, I'm nowhere near seeing enough of his fifty-two directorial efforts to merit using that particular subtitle. A better one could be "Beyond *The Beyond*." I've noticed that the genre press has somewhat ignored some of Fulci's newest work, and with the few reviews that do exist on some of these films; I think some great stuff is being pushed into obscurity.

Truthfully, very few films have the same brainwreck power of *The Beyond* (1981), and Fulci has yet to surpass that achievement, but he has come pretty close on occasion. Needless to say 1979 to 1981 were great years for Lucio. Not only *The Beyond*, but *Zombi 2* (1979), *City of the Living Dead* (a.k.a. *Gates of Hell*, 1980), and *House by the Cemetery* (1981) came from this period. If you have seen these you certainly don't need me to squirt adjectives about them, and if you haven't, get to work. As if those weren't enough, Lucio also made two other excellent films in those same three years.

Contraband (1980) was shot between *Zombi 2* and *City . . .* and although there are no Walking Dead, there is no shortage of violent mayhem. With all the people who get snuffed in this film, I think Lucio was building a body pile to get *Zombie* extras for his later films. Brains are blown out in slow motion, machine gun decapitations that give the gore in *Zombi 2* a run for its money, and a very slow facial disfigurement by burning that had my lunch moving for higher ground. This straightforward action revenge flick gets moving quickly, and doesn't relent until almost everyone is dead. Highly recommended.

Between *City . . .* and *The Beyond*, Fulci squeezed off another strange bit of celluloid, *The Black Cat* (1981). The cast includes big names like Patrick Magee, Mimsy Farmer, and *The Beyond*'s David Warbeck. The performances support the warped storyline, a cross-breeding of Fulci and Poe. Magee plays a psychic who tries to contact and record the dead by talking to tombstones. Of course, the titular black cat is running about causing death after death, and al-

though they are fairly restrained there is plenty of nastiness, including a claustrophobic nightmare of a suffocation scene. Lots of great ideas float through the film, and make for a bizarre viewing experience. From now on I'll be able to recognize Patrick Magee by the bridge of his nose, thanks to the wretched cropping on the tape version of the movie. *The Black Cat* is a strange homage to Poe, through the eyes and cameras of Lucio Fulci.



Heading back in time, both 1971 and 1972 saw the releases of two of Fulci's strongest films, and both of these are terminally overlooked. *Lizard In A Woman's Skin* (1971) and *Don't Torture a Duckling* (1972) are both stylish mystery films that offer up some intense scenes of violence. *Lizard* . . . landed Fulci and crew in court over the supposed mistreatment of animals on the set. Thankfully, Carlo Rambaldi produced the mechanical dogs that created such an unnerving effect onscreen. *Don't Torture* . . . is a great film which is of particular interest to fans, in that Fulci used some of his strongest, and best known, images in this movie first. The evil warlock of *The Beyond* got off light compared to the chain-whipping received by the town witch here. Also, the opening of *The Psychic*

(1977) is a surprisingly toned-down version of a brutal sequence near the end of *Don't Torture* . . . Both these films set the tone for Fulci's later work, and as such are required viewing for all Fulci addicts.

However, Lucio is laying new groundwork in his films, especially with the incredible *Cat In the Brain* (1990). The film is somewhat autobiographical, and Fulci steps out to take the starring role of "Fulvio," a horror film director. The opening scene of *Cat* . . . is an excellent metaphor for Fulci's work, as the camera plunges into his head and we see his tormented mind being torn apart by wild cats. This scene can work as an answer to the common complaint that Fulci's films are illogical. "Logic" must bend to the framework of the "Reality" that it is being presented in. In Fulci's work, the only reality that we are experienc-



ing is inside the mind of the director. We, as viewers, have to accept that, because isn't that what movies are about? As the psychic Therese says in *City of the Living Dead*, "The problem is in your mind; it can't accept the truth."

To appreciate his work, we must first accept the truths of Lucio Fulci. A cut-up world where everything is

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permitted. *Cat* . . . is a wonderful FUCK YOU!!! to his detractors, letting us all know that he has to let his visions out, before they kill him.

Lately, much has been said about the resurgence of Lucio Fulci. However, in the last decade he has only gone one year, 1985, without releasing a picture. He's been around, and now more of his later work is becoming available. In 1984, Fulci returned to mystery films, with the hit and miss project *Murder Rock: Dancing Death*. A few stylized murders and an exciting last half hour almost save the show, but not quite. I did enjoy seeing Olga Karlatos from *Zombi 2*, and am truly comforted to know for sure that she survived her crowning as "Miss Wooden-Stake-In-the-Bye, 1979."

1988 through 1990 have been strong years for the Maestro, with eight films in that short period of time. (That is if you want to include *Zombi 3* (1988), which he had little to do with). In 1988, Fulci did three other horror pictures. *Touch of Death*, about a murderous modern day Bluebeard; *The Ghosts of Sodom*, which had teens

being tormented by Nazi ghosts; and *Demonia*. *Demonia* is a weird possession movie that was his strongest that year. This one is a lot like the *Zombie* films of the early eighties, with plenty of graphic gore and murky atmosphere. Quite similar to *The Beyond*, the mixture of crucified nuns, angry mobs, tongue mutilation, and some truly holocaustic jungle gore add up to a very satisfying film.

In 1989, Fulci directed two episodes of "House of Doom" for Italian television. Umberto Lenzi also contributed to the show. Who do we write to swap this show with "Freddy's Nightmares?" The two episodes are "House of Clocks" and "Sweet House of Horrors." Judging from "House of Clocks" this is a good show, and graphic beyond belief. The story has Living Dead, time twisting, and some cool gore spewing coming together for an interesting eighty-three minute telefilm.

1990 had *Cat In the Brain*, which I've already mentioned, and his latest release, *Voices From Beyond*. This is a strange meshing of reality and psy-

chotic distortion as a dead man tries to solve the mystery behind his own murder. Fulci appears as coroner who performs a particularly nasty autopsy. Very strange.

There are many other interesting films in the Fulci library, such as the ultra-rare *Dracula in the Provinces* (1975), *Four Gunmen of the Apocalypse* (1975), and even Fulci's adaptation of *White Fang* (1973) and it's sequel. One day I hope to see these and many others, so I can write the definitive version of this article.

Now, so that I can get this off of my chest, I highly recommend that you check out both *Aenigma* (1987) and *Manhattan Baby* (a.k.a. the much more appealing *Eye of the Evil Dead*, 1985). Both of these films have been so abused that I was astonished to enjoy both of them so much. *Aenigma*

is especially good with sucking snails, animated statues, and decapitated bodies galore, this is a good horror film. Don't believe the hype, check them out for yourself.

As a matter of fact, pure Fulci logic is exemplified in a classic scene from *Aenigma*, when our heroine casually gets in an elevator, goes down, ends up in a morgue of decapitated corpses, and turns to see the elevator vanish. The real door is about two feet away from her. How did she get into the room? The Fulci way. His reality is not an intruder in ours, but one that exists to release the cats from his brain. This unified worldview is what makes the works of Lucio Fulci so enjoyable.

That and a poke in the eye with a 10" splinter.

Zombie





LUCIO FULCI

**DEEP RED INTERVIEWS
THE MAESTRO OF
MAGGOT MAYHEM**

*By Loris Cural and
Antonio Tentori*

DEEP RED: Let's start off with your last film, *Door To Silence*, which is something quite different from your standards . . .

FULCI: I agree. I wrote the story quite a long time ago. I have always wanted to make a movie out of it, and now that I did, I feel that it could have turned out better.

DEEP RED: What do you mean?

FULCI: Well . . . first of all, I wonder why Massaccesi decided to produce it in the first place. He knew it was not a horror movie and that it wouldn't look like any of my previous works. My feeling is that we needed more time to work on it. We had only three weeks, and there was no way we could shoot for more than three hours a day, because it was raining most of the time, and I wanted to give the film a very "solar" imprint. I had to face dozens of problems, and had too little time to solve them . . .

DEEP RED: Is this why you went for a jazz soundtrack? It gives the film a touch of those glorious Italian thrillers of the early Seventies.

FULCI: Well, Massaccesi changed it! Now you have the usual, boring classical stuff, with all those violins and everything. The score was beautiful, and now that he changed it all of the magic is gone. You saw the film . . . it was that free-jazz kind of stuff that I too remember having heard in many

other films. It was more than appropriate to *Door To Silence*, and now it's gone.

DEEP RED: Why that pseudonym, Simon Kittay?

FULCI: I don't know! I didn't know they were going to change my name. Maybe they thought they could sell it better if they used all American pseudonyms. They should know by now that my mov-

"Voices From Beyond is . . . a neat little film, with lotsa gore and a good script. I am particularly fond of it . . ."

ies always find an audience in the States. Or don't they?

DEEP RED: Yeah, you still have a lot of fans there, probably more than in Italy . . .

FULCI: I got used to it. I know that in France and Japan I'm considered a cult director. Here, in Italy, most of the critics don't like horror movies.

DEEP RED: *Voices From Beyond*, which is your latest horror to date, is dedicated to an Italian reviewer, Claudio Carabba . . .

FULCI: It is also dedicated to Clive Barker, who's a good friend of mine. Carabba is maybe the only journalist, along with younger ones like you and Antonio, who has

"As for the new directors, I don't see any particular genius around the corner. Michele Soavi is the only one who can write and tell stories like Mario Bava and Riccardo Freda used to."

always showed some consideration for my films. He really manages to catch the spirit. I decided to dedicate the film to Barker for the same reasons . . .

Voices From Beyond is not actually a horror movie. I like to consider it a thriller. You have this guy who gets killed by his family and he wants his daughter to take revenge on the executors. He sorts out investigations on his own death. It's a neat little film, with lots of gore and a good script. I am particularly fond of it . . .

DEEP RED: Both *Voices* and *Nightmare Concert* were shot on a very low budget . . .

FULCI: *Damonia* too. Nowadays, in Italy, nobody wants to spend good money on a splatter film. It gets always more difficult to find producers who are willing to invest in horror movies. This is not only my problem, but also Argento's. I'd say this is a very difficult time for the genre. I still feel that *Door To Silence* was a movie that needed a bigger budget. We had a good story and we spoiled it. I've lost my chance to make a great film out of it.

On the other hand, *Nightmare Concert* is a film I'm completely satisfied with. The Italian distributor ruined it by cutting the final

scene, which I think was necessary. Hell, it was one of my best climaxes!

DEEP RED: Why did you decide to star in it? So far, you've only appeared in some cameos . . .

FULCI: I told myself: If my friend David Cronenberg plays a psycho why can't I do the same? No, the truth is that we considered looking for a good actor for my role. But then I gave it a try, and I must say I had big fun.

"I only shot 52 minutes (of *Zombi 3*). Not much of my art is left on the final print. I am definitely not satisfied with it."

DEEP RED: Lately you've been directing some TV movies. Did you enjoy the experience?

FULCI: I've shot four TV films so far . . . the first two: *Sodoma's Ghost* and *Alice Has Broken the Mirror* are a bit too "strong" for television. The latter was shown a few months ago, but very late at night. I don't think *Sodoma's Ghost*

will ever appear at any time. Unless they cut it, of course *La Dolce Casa Degli Orrori* and *La Casa Del Tempo* are more fantasy-oriented. Both films were adopted from a couple of my short stories. As you know, I will soon be publishing a book that contains them all.

DEEP RED: What's the truth behind *Zombi 3*?

FULCI: I made that film because I needed the money. If you know me you notice that it's not real Fulci trademark. I only shot 52 minutes of it, then left the set. The producers called Bruno Mattel to film the rest. Not much of my art is left on the final print. I am definitely not satisfied with it. I remember that it was screened at the Fantafestival in Rome. The audience was roaring with laughter and made nasty jokes about it. It's a shame I ever got involved with it. But then, as Fritz Lang used to say on shooting *Gardenia Blue*, which was so much different from *M* and *Metropolis*: " . . . every now and then I also have to eat something."

"... the toughest is poor Daniela Doria vomiting her insides. Next to her is Michele Soavi was really feeling sick!"

DEEP RED: A couple of years ago your name appeared on a Joe Martucci film: *The Red Monks* . . .

FULCI: Yes. I remember. I had nothing to do with it. I was asked to lend my name, that's all. I don't want people to think it's my film. I didn't even meet the guy!

DEEP RED: What happened with *Demonia*? It was supposed to be released theatrically while it only came out on video?

FULCI: That's another sad story. *Demonia* is a good film. I shot it in Sicily, a land with an important historical background. I tried to give the story a dream-like atmosphere, and I think it shows. It's probably one of my most intriguing scripts, and it brought me back to special effects and gore.

DEEP RED: I remember you took care of the optical effects in an American production: *The Curse* (a.k.a. *The Farm*). The one directed by David Keith . . .

FULCI: I was also associate producer on that one! One day Ovidio Ossantls called me and asked me to work on the special effects. I haven't seen the film yet, but working there was fun. I helped Keith a lot, I remember him coming and asking me for help. He's a nice guy.

DEEP RED: You once told me about the difference between your zombies and Romero's *Living Dead*. Let's tell these people what your thought is . .

"I feel that my *Zombie* is an authentic zombie film! My inspiration came from Jacques Tourneur, not from Romero."

FULCI: I feel that *Zombie* is an authentic zombie film! I wanted to send them back (the zombies . . .) to their origins, this is why we shot the film in Santo Domingo. My inspiration came from Jacques Tourneur, not from Romero. His living dead are alienated who live on the fringes of society. It's the revenge of the defeated from life. I truly think that *Dawn of the Dead* is a political movie, a great movie, but different from my *Zombie*.

DEEP RED: There's a sequence in *Zombie* which is considered one of the most audacious in modern horror. How did you come up with that one?

FULCI: You're talking about Olga Karlatos getting it in the eye?

DEEP RED: Yep . . .

FULCI: It's one of my favorites . . . I have a funny anecdote related to that sequence. I was in Atlanta looking for a place to shoot one of my films, and there was a theater playing *Zombie*. I remember there were four or five kids playing with a pinball machine and they had this smaller one keeping an eye on the film. When the "infamous" scene came up, they all stopped playing and watched the movie

instead. The scene ended and they went back to their games. They were yelling and screaming most of the time . . .

DEEP RED: In *City of the Walking Dead* there's another of those unforgettable splatter scenes of yours . . .

FULCI: There's more than one, but the toughest is poor Daniela Doria vomiting her insides. Next to her is Michele Soavi was really feeling sick! Doria was one of my favorite actresses, she was always very good on my films. Actually, I killed her so many times . . .

You know, it is much easier for a director to work with women. Usually actresses are more enthusiastic than actors. Men are monolithic; it's much more difficult to let them understand what it's like to be killed. I love working with women.

DEEP RED: Is it a coincidence that most of your female victims are blonde?

FULCI: No coincidence. This is pure Hitchcock territory. I agree with the Maestro, the blonde in danger is definitely more scary. My belief is that a dark-haired

"Men are monolithic. It's much more difficult to let them understand what it's like to be killed."

lady lacks the fragility which is a characteristic of most blond actresses. You could almost say that mine is a form of misogyny, and not because I hate women, on the contrary . . . but you know, I have always lived in families composed by women. With my grandma, my mother and aunt first, and then my two daughters . . . However, the main thing is that it is always a painful experience to see a woman get killed. They can be beautiful, victims or executioners. Men will never be that good, because of their stiffness . . .

DEEP RED: The Italians have somehow modified the image of the female lead. In our thrillers, women don't usually offer themselves "spontaneously" to death, as in most American films, like *Friday the 13th*, for example . . .

FULCI: Absolutely right! You know, Jason is a Biblical assassin. His name reveals all his hatred for any form of transgression and sin. He is the punisher of rock music, sex and drugs. You know why this series is so popular in the States? Because the Americans have this great respect and fear for religion. They really believe in divine punishment.

DEEP RED: Who's going to take over, the day you decide to stop making movies? In other words, what's new in the Italian field?

FULCI: I'm no Akira Kurosawa. I'm not sure I'll still be making movies at 80. As for the new directors, I don't see any particular genius around the corner. Michele Soavi is the only one who can write and tell stories like Mario Bava and Riccardo Freda used to. He made good films, especially his debut feature, *Deliria*.

My feeling is that you need a certain amount of imagination if you want to make horror movies. You need the right skills. You have to tell a story and don't forget about technique, which is always so important when you shoot a horror film.

The thing I like about these movies is that they can be so real and then so far from reality. I remember once, during a film festival in Paris, they were screening my *City of the Walking Dead*. When the show was through, a girl came to me, she had a terrible handicap. She took my hands and said: "I have experienced a beautiful, tremendous nightmare with this film of yours. I thank you for that, but now the real nightmare begins . . . I have to get back to everyday

"Jason is a Biblical assassin. He is the punisher of rock music, sex and drugs. Americans have this great respect and fear for religion. They really believe in divine punishment."

"You need a good budget to make a decent sequel to *The Beyond*, and I really don't think I will ever do it."

life." See what I mean? Horror films are libratory, they help people to feel better.

DEEP RED: Anything new on the Fulci front?

FULCI: I'm writing another thriller, but it's a bit too early to talk about it. I'll keep you informed

DEEP RED: What about *The Beyond* 2?

FULCI: (Laughs) I don't know. I've never seriously considered a sequel to that one. Once a Japanese producer offered me to produce it, but then he just disappeared You need a good budget to make a decent sequel to *The Beyond*, and I really don't think I will ever do it. I don't wanna make another *Zombi 3*. No way .

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"My old stand is proud, congratulate me . . ."

- R.E.M.

"What a long, strange trip it's been . . ."

- *The Grateful Dead*

"Oh no, no, please, God help me!"

- *Black Sabbath*

The fine mess began in the hot summer of 1988. Asmodeus Productions, Inc., (Mike King, Marcello Games and myself) were in the Chi-Town finishing the final sound mix for our second feature, my directorial debut, *Deadbeat At Dawn*. Alexander Beck Enterprises, our signed foreign distributor of the film, had sent us xeroxed copies of contracts negotiated at that year's AFM in Los Angeles. He had seemingly secured presales in eight territories. *Deadbeat* looked like success.

Mike had arranged for the mix at X recording studios on credit by the strength of those xeroxed contracts. Things were stylin'! The Mix! At last! Thank Fucking God! *Deadbeat At Dawn* had taken three and a half grueling years to complete; a victim of improper financing. Now we had presales into profit! Hot Damn.

The mix was going very well. Since we had not paid upfront, we were delegated to after hours mixing. We would show up at five p.m., mix until 2:30 a.m., crash until noon, head to the beach and drink until 4:30. It was a fine schedule. During one of these golden, foamy afternoons, convinced of our imminent wealth, we conceived the plan to raise seed money for another feature and dive right in. *Deadbeat* profits would cover most of the production if we stayed 16 mm and low budget. Mike suggested a down and dirty treatment of the

Charles Manson saga; *Cult Killer*. When it was agreed that I should direct, the tunnel vision of the mix clouded my judgement into committing to a September starting date. I began an insane process of trying to co-write a script with Mark Guillespie (a.k.a. *John Martin*) over long distance telephone, while also mixing *Deadbeat*. Though the attempt did not yield a script, Guillespie sug-

Charlie's Family



gested a striking structure for the film's mock-documentary approach; interspersed faked television interviews with the imprisoned

member of the "Family." Of course, this concept wasn't anything new; Bob Fosse had recently put it to use in *Lenny*, *All That Jazz* and *Star 80*. However, for this film it was perfect and provided a necessary spine to join re-enactments spanning two and a half years.

As soon as we returned to Dayton, we assembled locations, a cast, wardrobe, and film, all thanks to a seed money investment.

During the fall of 1988, we were running out of funds at a horrifying clip.

Alright, all of you beginning filmmakers, repeat after me:

"I swear I will not start shooting until the entire budget is in the bank."

Of course, if I had followed that rule, *Deadbeat At Dawn* never have would of gotten off the ground. Also, we had no idea that the AFM contracts, thanks to a horribly twisting market, would never be honored; leaving Asmodeus with it's collective dick in its hand and stinking cat urine on its face.

The actors were solemnly informed of our situation. All of them graciously agreed to continue on deferment. Finally, on November 12, the hard, ugly fact that we had to temporarily pull the plug was in my face like an erupting zit. I dropped acid, bought a bottle of Jim Beam and immediately upon arriving on location and looking at the actors, postponed shooting.

That was November 1988. I was 23. Now I'm 27. *Charlie's Family* has grown and mutated remarkably, like a crack baby that refuses to die. A wealth of information on the Family has reached me since and has been carefully incorporated. The changing continuities of the cast's aging over years of sporadic shoots has



actually worked for the film, as the film's structure is a collection of isolated incidents in a two and a half section of the Family's twenty-five year history. The film is almost picture locked with final sound editing needing to be done. At this time, we also need a sound mix, lab opticals and final printing. And a distribution company . . .

Recently we were haggling with Roger Corman's Concorde over a possible completion deal. After a month and a half, we were given a firm no, along with an explanation that Roger is now concentrating on producing G-rated "family comedies." Our "family" didn't meet their standard.

It is sometimes very discouraging, this backlash against films with a bite, NC-17 or unrated. But I'm true to my girl. I'm in love and this 16 mm epic is just too damn good to compromise on. We owe many people money and have suffered too many fools, would-be financiers and soul-sucking freaks to quit. We have pumped too many sacks of plasma, worked on too many silly fucking commercials and industrials to look backwards. It really is only a matter of time before I will hold a release print of *Charlie's Family* in my grimy hands. I remember Orson Welles and his *Orkello*. Time to get back on the phones . . .

Making Your Adversaries' Life A LIVING HELL

For Just Under \$ 10!

By Greg Goodsell

Horror fans.

Ostracized, misunderstood, isolated.

That rare breed of individual to whom the outcome of the World Series or the depletion of the ozone layer holds no excitement or concern.

In the larger cities, there is endless opportunity to join up with like-minded kindred spirits; conventions, nightclubs and film related activities give those a chance to meet other people who *actually care* about the alternate video running times of *Dr. Blood's Coffin* (1964).

Not so for those of us who live in Bumfart, Nebraska.

The cold, disbelieving stares of your town's sole video outlet - "*Three On A Meathook? Nest of the Cuckoo Birds? Rana, the Mystery of Shadow Lake?* Sir or madam, if we do not have them on the shelves, we do not carry them . . ." I'm sure we can all relate on some level.

There is hope. Thanks to widely distributed publications, both professional and amateur, the horror video consumer is privy to a plethora of videos, books and magazines on titles one longs to see and perhaps own. Films one has heard about but has never seen, films one has never heard about but offer the thrill of the untried, films one has seen long ago but have since escaped a second or third appraisal - all for the taking on the mail-order video market.

The management of such services, it would seem to follow, would appear to be like-minded individuals, enthusiastic about the genre, sharing a kinship with their customers who long to view the rare and unusual. The management of these underground, sometimes above-board video services would seemingly share a "one for all and all for one" attitude, one that transcends mere monetary gain to jointly celebrate and share the films they cherish and adore.

And if you believe that preceding paragraph, to paraphrase Johnny Marr's *Murder Can Be Fun* fanzine, you're probably still bummed out that Santa Claus didn't arrive at Christmas last year.

For the *naïf* out there in our readership, the horror fandom world is often an angry, dangerous place. Many self-proclaimed experts upon inspection know very little. Amiable "small fish" personalities show the characteristics of blood-engorged piranha when scratched. Still others make virtual careers out of prolonged character assassinations.

The international world of horror fandom oft times are dark and troubling waters. Rivalries and conditions of enmity are created from a situation which is best metaphorically described as many fearsome red warrior ants fighting over the same granule of sugar.

To illustrate this, the author offers the follow striking series of tableau . . .

Many horror fans are adult males who remember the days of their youth, mailing in cereal tops for worthless gimmicks that break in an hour. This childhood pastime prepares the young for maturity, that of waiting endlessly for some small reward that always invariably disappoints.

As grown-ups, the horror fan can momentarily stay in touch with the eternal child within us all by sending money through the mail to exotic locales for books, videos and magazines offering new and unknown pleasures. Let's call this game "Mail Roulette." Sometimes the item is new and exciting. Other times the book/video/magazine is not what we expect, nonetheless pointing out different approaches to our leisure activity. Many other times the horror consumer is left with a piece of shit, leaving the player with something more odious than egg splattered over their proverbial puss.

Horror stories - not about hockey-masked marauders butchering fornicating teens, arise from this predicament.

The antagonists in these horror stories are not unlike the soul-less husks under galactic control in some 1950s alien mind-control epic; all the more insidious because *they come disguised as one of us!*

Some companies ship consistently inferior product.

Some companies take six months to ship product that shouldn't take more than a week to mail.

Some companies promise much, delivering very little.

Still other companies simply take the money and run.

A Rogues' Gallery of the worst offenders -

- Mike Flores of *It's Only A Movie! Thrill-O-Rama*, to the best of our knowledge, has never shipped anything from the mail-order branch of his Chicago-based business. Well, not without a lot of undue screaming and kvetching on the customer's part, anyway. Flores, along with Pam "Boom Boom" Smith take pride in their "Psychotronic Society" while fleecing the gullible. Product from this company, when it arrives, is highly inferior. Items seem to be geared to what is considered "hip" and "outré" to others. One can fault these people for being overly trendy, but their practice of charging Chicago patrons \$5 to see Betty Page loops off tiny TV's in taverns, not shipping orders, and composing a rambling, idiotic letter and signing your author's name and address to it in #3 is just **FUCKING INEXCUSABLE!**

- Amok Books, a publishing and retail firm in Los Angeles garners lots of favorable press recognition. It's obvious that the major periodicals that have featured them in their pages have yet to do any sort of business transaction with Amok. Championing the strange and unusual in print, the majority of Amok Books' business is conducted through mail order. Letters from all over the world with checks and money orders pile up in some spare L.A. bedroom, as, yup, you guessed it, they too do not ship orders. When and if the customer deigns to complain, the merchandise arrives belatedly and/or incomplete. The clerks offer the cursory "We're sorry, this book is out of stock, take

advantage of this credit slip" - *nine months later!* The majority of their stock is readily available through special order at Waldenbook's at the sterile mall near your home. The only worth this organization has is their slummy little retail outlet in Silverlake, which is likewise staffed by apathetic clerks who give the wily customer ample opportunities to shoplift.

- We used to think that Donald Farmer of *Splatter Times/Mondo Video* was a nice guy. A wimpy sort of gent with an eye towards the unclad scream queen, his service offered countless rare and illegal video bootlegs. Again, he ships ninth-generation bootlegs of edited shit if he mails anything at all. Dig that excuse he gave Michael Weldon of *Psychotronic Video* - "I got hurt in a car wreck, my mother is handling all the orders" - *yeah, right.*

Assholes, miserable assholes, all of 'em! Hard-earned cash grabbed by grasping hands who realize few will file proper complaints to authorities. They figure your \$50-\$75 order will not be worth the effort to track down and account for. The immediate image that comes to mind is the unkempt fast-food worker in that popular TV commercial who sarcastically proclaims "KA-CHING!" to an ever mounting luncheon bill.

What are you going to do about it?
Thought you'd never ask.

YOU GONNA LET THEM GET AWAY WITH THIS, GUY?

The technique best suited to deal with these shylocks is called many things - "form letter hate mail," "Hanging paper," "malicious networking" come to mind. We like to call it "justice, well served."

Before one undertakes this economical and highly effective method of retribution, one must determine if the intended victim is worth it. Sent \$2 for a 'zine that never arrived? Get a life! Lose \$22 for a shitty quality video bootleg that wasn't the film you ordered? Live and learn!

- ... lose over \$150 for films that never arrived? Have an article of yours stolen that was attributed to the thief? Have a person in fandom publicly defame your reputation?

- It's time to spring to action.

All you do is write in a truthful fashion your beefs with this particular person or organization, maybe with a dash of artful collage using this company's masthead or cover art, go to the neighborhood print shop, run off about 60 to 90 copies and start mailing them across the world.

Since virtually every amateur fanzine has contact lists of dozens of like-minded periodicals, you can start there. If the accused is a magazine, send copies to all their advertisers. Send copies to every magazine you know; just don't stay within the narrow confines of the horror film magazine market - try *Interview*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *National Enquirer*. Everybody loves a good scandal and enquiring minds want to know.

To post, simply fold three times and staple. With reduced rates for fliers and postcards, you can squeeze out a maximum amount of mailings for little more than \$10. There's simply no end to the fun you can have with this little homemade project.

You'll be so clever in this little endeavor, you'll almost think that YOU were the one who originally came up with the idea. In reality, this technique is as old as mail order.

Don't bother to mail your victim a copy of the flier. Long distance phone

calls from people who know you, people who know the victim and curious individuals will all be demanding an explanation to what "precisely is going on here?"

In the tradition of yet another popular TV commercial, about a shampoo built around "word of mouth," "they'll tell two friends, and they'll tell two friends, and so on, and so on, and so on . . ."

Don't think that they won't.

Chances are your flier will fall into the hands of other individuals who have been burned by this particular individual or organization. It will inspire them to do their own mailings, perhaps incorporating your flier with theirs. A mad monster party will be happily underway.

You simply cannot lose. Even if the recipient of your unsolicited love letter wads it up after reading it in the day's post, it will inextricably alter their view of your victim forever.

Ideally, no real malice or libel is intended. The purpose of the mailing will be one to spur action and to make sure that justice is done. If your victim doesn't come forth with their retraction, goods or whatever, it will only further your cause.

Is there a catch to this approach?

Several.

- Certain nefarious individuals who have no right to be indignant with innocent parties can use this as a smear tactic. Rat finks employing this technique can tarnish the reputations of casual bystanders due to petty jealousy and bitter infighting.

The only recourse the innocent has against this is the quality of their reputation. If your reputation is chaste and unsullied to begin with, this will only show the bad-mouthers up for what they are.

Everybody reading this book has chaste and unsullied reputations, don't they?

- You can only get away with this once. More than once, you will be scratched off as a whiner, malcontent and cry baby with little more than time on your hands.

- This will only work if you are a small fish in a large pond.

If you are a big fish, like Chris Gore with his nationally distributed and heavily financed *Film Threat* magazine, to employ this tactic would only tarnish your glamorous Hollywood image.

If you are a nobody victimized by big publishers and video outlets, the world is already on your side. For moneyed and lavishly backed corporations like *Film Threat*, to stoop to this level of xeroxed character assassination would only make them look foolish and ill-advised.

A FEW FINAL WORDS OF ADVICE

With the relinquishing of *Factsheet Five* to new management, there are currently no publications functioning as a watchdog for the various abuses of the underground publication and video scene.

Who shall pick up the torch?

In the meanwhile, anybody can bring down the high and mighty with just a little bit o' spit and polish and a handful of stamps. Employ that "punk rock" do-it-yourself attitude and you too, can right wrongs and fight injustice.

Go 'wan! *Do it!*

Certainly you know somebody whose life deserves to be made a living hell for just under \$10



MICHELE SOAVI

ITALY'S HOTTEST NEW DIRECTOR

INTERVIEWED by CHAS BALUN

I've finally found someone who looks just as out of place amidst the lavish opulence of the highbrow Principe di Savoia as your correspondent. Similarly clad in worn Levi's and T-shirts, we both stand out like boners in a convent. Any joint that commands 500 bucks a night is not likely to see many splatter mavens romping through their foyers or slamming down \$10 drinks in their piano bar, either - well, at least not 'til next year, anyway. But, hey, this ain't the 'hood, bro' - this is Milan, Italy; and we're guests of the prestigious Dylan Dog Horror Fest, merely schmoozing our way through another afternoon at the host hotel. Soon, a trim but muscular, denim-clad figure locks eyes with me and gives a knowing wink. Ah, another signal from a fellow *fratello di sangue* momentarily stranded in a lobby full of Japanese robots masquerading as business

travelers; impeccably attired doorfellows, concierges and loads of stiff, waxen figures who look like they just stepped out of a GQ catalog. A real party bunch.

I stand and extend my hand to the approaching figure gliding effortlessly through the suited-up zombie horde. A warm grin and a metacarpal-crunching handshake officially announce the arrival of Michele (pronounced Mick-el-ee) Soavi - actor, artiste, director and biker extraordinaire. Though far from a household name, anyone hip to the Italian horror scene is no doubt familiar with his work on both sides of the camera. Who amongst us can forget Soavi's impassioned performance as the terrified boyfriend of Queen Chunkblow during the infamous gut-barfing sequence in Lucio Fulci's *Gates of Hell*? Awesome reaction shot there, Michele; but then, we'd probably do exactly the same thing once the first twelve feet of intestine had slithered out somebody's mouth, too.

Soavi has also appeared as an actor in Lamberto Bava's *A Blade In the Dark and Demons* (the masked ticket vendor); Joe D'Amato's *Emperor Calligula: The Untold Story*; and Dario Argento's *Phenomena* and *Opera*. He's served as assistant director on both *Phenomena* and *Demons*;





worked behind the camera on *Tenebrae* and *Opera*, and made his directorial debut on the excellent documentary *Dario Argento's World of Horror*. His first feature film, *Stagefright* (aka *Deliria*, *Bloody Bird*, *Aquarius*), made for well under \$1 million announced the coming-of-age for a major new genre visionary. That promise was fulfilled by his next two films: *The Church* and *The Sect* (retitled *The Devil's Daughter* for Stateside release), and now Soavi seems confidently poised to make his

own mark in the film world, away from the omnipresent aura of his former mentor. It's odd then, that the name most frequently mentioned during our conversation was not Maestro Argento's, but rather Joe D'Amato (Aristide Massaccesi). Though given little screen credit on *Stagefright*, D'Amato is readily identified as the man who first insisted that Soavi get behind a camera.

"I didn't decide to direct. D'Amato chose me," Soavi explains. "I wasn't working much and had asked for any

"I didn't decide to direct. D'Amato chose me. 'Are you mad?' I replied."

job as an assistant on the crew. I had directed a couple of videos with (Rolling Stone) Bill Wyman and Claudio Simonetti to help promote *Phenomena* and after I showed them to D'Amato, he rang me up. 'I want you to direct!' he said. 'Are you mad?' I replied. Then I reconsidered. 'OK, it's your risk.' I was very excited; it was though I had fallen from the clouds."

Soavi is very forthright in his affection for D'Amato and the patience shown during the first few shaky weeks of filming *Stagefright*. "Yes, I admire him a lot. He really believed in me. Really trusted me. After he had some of the rushes from the first week of shooting, he was very excited," Soavi remembers. "I was kind of slow at first, but it was coming out very, very well and D'Amato was impressed enough to say that he didn't care if I went over budget. You know, D'Amato can do every job in the business - director, producer, cinematographer.... He made filmmaking very simple. He insisted that every person could learn to do every job. He taught me to use a smaller crew and showed the reality of getting 40 - 50 shots a day. In contrast, Dario uses a huge crew and sometimes gets only seven or eight shots a day."

Though anxious to move from beneath Argento's prodigious shadow and establish his own cinematic identity, Soavi pauses to give the Maestro his due. "As a kid, I was really impressed with Dario. I was fourteen years-old when I saw *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and it really terrified me. I was very impressed

with this one man terrifying a thousand people. The potential to do this.... was exhilarating. I then discovered the language of film: the editing, camera movements and angles. I began to understand Dario's technical tricks."

Some of the knowledge gleaned during Soavi's apprenticeship was also a source of friction between the two as Soavi attempted to commit his own vision to film. "Dario likes to control the show. Every story he produces - he likes to write it. And sometimes he's on your back. There's always the compromise; some fighting and then a little peace." Soavi offers a capsule summary of their basic differences. "Dario hates women. I love women. Dario hates actors. I love them." Working under Argento's stringent tutelage is sometimes "like pissing in front of your mother," Soavi sighs.

From piss to guts, the conversation takes a rapid turn towards a subject dear to the hearts of every card-carrying Stateside splatologist: Lucio Fulci. "I met Fulci while I was still an actor. They hired me for *Gates of Hell* because they thought I looked 'American.' But there's a lot of sitting around and waiting while acting; real boring stuff, so I went to Fulci and said I wanted some more work. I got hired for \$30 a day as a grip. I sawed lumber for the dolly tracks. I also observed Fulci at work and I thought he was a marvelous director. He frequently used two cameras and synchronized his shots. He was very quick. He is also usually mad and pissed off on the set and he offered me little protection, but still, I admired him."

Besides mentioning these obvious choices as major career influences, Soavi also reveals a childhood steeped

in the artistic life and the pleasures of the paintbrush. It is no coincidence that the color, composition and chiar-oscuro (look it up, it's good for ya) of some of his most potent cinematic visions reflect a solid knowledge of the craft of painting. "I grew up in a very creative atmosphere. My father was writing books about painters, and after the divorce my mother remarried a painter. The walls were full of paintings; some with very terrible subjects: war, torture, blood, skulls When I was 11 years old, I was drawing pretty well - a lot of skulls especially. I became quite good, eventually. I was also a painter as well, up 'til about five years ago; but now directing takes so much time." Soavi also notes that rabbits were always a favorite subject of his, which may help explain the wily and whacked-out presence of a particularly clever *Oryctolagus cuniculus* hip-hopping throughout his latest film, *The Sect*.

In fact, Soavi clearly relishes all the personal and idiosyncratic flourishes he can bestow upon his films and never regards working within genre conventions as a self-limiting experience. He still finds much to be excited about with each project and actually feels that horror filmmaking is a very liberating endeavor. "Horror is merely a pretext," he insists. "It is a background - a starting point. You can do whatever you like. It is the gate of freedom. Once in, you are far more free than you would be in other movies."

Soavi is also quick to point out that despite the acclaim he has garnered in the last few years, he is all but ignored in his home country. He appears genuinely grateful and flattered that there is indeed, an overseas contingent that holds his work in such

high regard. "My films are more appreciated in foreign countries," he says, with a hint of sadness in his voice. "I actually feel more at home in England or America. My ancient roots are foreign, not Italian."

Even though many Stateside journalists cite Italy's rich history of horrors and their legendary directors, we both comment on the fact that not a single Italian film is scheduled to be screened at the Horror Fest. Soavi offers his own assessment on the slippery status of splatter in Pastaland and the difference between the American and Italian horror film. "The U.S. is a much younger country, full of energy. The movies are more

"Horror is merely a pretext. It is a background - a starting point. You can do whatever you like."

frenetic - lots of camera movement and quick edits. Usually, there is little emotion involved. The shots are always shorter because TV has changed the way we see things. I like to be able to allow more time for a deeper emotion to evolve. Going to the movies used to be a tremendous, quite marvelous experience; but now, TV has made people lazy - that silly box! Emotions get filtered out through the glass screen and we watch events like the Gulf War as some kind of game, a tennis match, for our amusement. We find something in the dead bodies and in the desperation of others to amuse us. In Italy now, we are just watching. There has been a lot of political confusion and we don't know where we are going. It reflects in our creativity and in the movies, too.

Movies are mirrors that reflect what is happening around us, but now, in Italy, the TV news has become a favorite pastime. We no longer seem to have a desperation to put something on film. Maybe we are living in a cocoon and feel as though we don't need anything else. You have to feel very strongly about something to put it on film. You must feel it in your heart."

Soavi then recalls the three films that gave him a sudden change of heart. "I saw *Vampyr* when I was six-years old. It was real horror and it changed my life. I also cherish Todd Browning's *Freaks*. And, *Mad Max* - it was simple, pure; and filled with very strong ideas. It was cheap but complete."

Though currently immersed in pre-production duties on several upcoming theatrical and television films, Soavi still finds time for the occasional acting gig. "In January, Franco Rossi, who's 70 years-old and still a very good director, will do a film on one of the old presidents of the Italian republic. When I read the script I noticed that my grandfather had been included as a real character. I called the director right away and he agreed that I could be cast to play my own grandfather in the film." Soavi tightens up at this rather unique opportunity but admits that he still finds acting "very easy and lazy, too. You have too little responsibility."

He will soon be tackling several other Italian television films, including *Lady's Nightmare* and *Croco-*

"You have to feel very strongly about something to put it on film. You must feel it in your heart."

diles, the latter of which he describes as "typical TV stuff; it's a spy story and a thriller. Unfortunately, it has nothing to do with horror or fantasy; but it will be an honest work. It is a new door for me. Now I feel really free because for so long I was so closely tied in with Dario."

Regardless of whom he has been aligned with in the past, it is quite clear that Michele Soavi will soon become a Maestro on his very own terms. He possesses the passion, the heart and the handshake of one whose vision cannot, and will not be denied.

Special thanks to John Gullidge and Samhain magazine.



"I saw *Vampyr* when I was six years-old. It was real horror and it changed my life."

AN UNBELIEVABLE ORGY OF TERROR!



TERROR FOR \$10,000

THE OUTRAGEOUS CAREER OF ANDY MILLIGAN

By Walter L. Gay

In the early 1960s, when gorehounds my age were in Kindergarten and unaware that exploitation flicks even existed, a transplanted Saint Paul native working in the New York dress business was about to change careers. On the advice of a Big Apple disc jockey named Art Ford, Andy Milligan laid out roughly \$300 for an Auricon single-system 16 mm camera. One wonders if Ford had any idea what Milligan was up to; the Auricon, built like a tank, was ideal for television stand-ups but an editor's nightmare when it came to dialogue and action since the sound was optically printed onto the film. Never one to worry about such trivialities, Milligan went merrily to work.

In fine low-budget tradition, he shot on weekends, presumably while he and his cohorts held down real jobs during the week. His first work was an obscure film with the unassuming title of *Liz*. It was no horror film but it bears mention here because it served to introduce the ex-garmenteer to the vagaries of the exploitation business in very short order.

Of all the distributors who attended Milligan's screenings, only the infamously cunning William Mishkin was willing to peddle *Liz*, and then if only Milligan inserted a number of gratuitous nude scenes to make it more suitable for his lowbrow market. Milligan eventually shot the extra scenes, under a minute, of bare-breasted models in the dressing room. Mishkin promptly retitled it *The Promiscuous Sex* and played it for 29 profitable weeks at the World Theatre. This was Milligan's first brush with Mishkin's method of "insert" filmmaking, which would influence more of his work at the turn of the decade.

After *Liz/The Promiscuous Sex*, Mishkin gave Milligan a whopping \$7,500 to make any film he wanted. Exploitation would have been easy and hard-core porn a snap, but Milligan decided to do one of his contemporary horror movies instead. *The Naked Witch*, a.k.a. *The Naked Temptress* (1963) was made in Manassquan, New Jersey in less than two weeks. It centered on a modern college student who becomes possessed by the

spirit of a sorceress put to death in the 1800s. For this effort Milligan employed a little-known bit of folklore - that witches, like vampires, can be slain through a stake through the heart. *The Naked Witch* turned a tidy profit, as a movie is bound to do when made for under \$8,000. As a director who could create sleazoid horror out of next to nothing, Andy Milligan had arrived.

Milligan ground out the bulk of his two dozen films during the 1960s. As the rest



of the world went mad around him, Milligan remained in his own little world turning out exploitation features with such sledgehammer-subtle titles as *Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me*; *Guttertrash*; *Fleshpot of 42nd Street* and *The Filthy Five*. These charmers contained not only wholesale drug abuse, male and female full-frontal nudity, profanity and daring-for-the-times sexual situations, but far more violence than one would expect. People were beaten, flung out of win-

dows and crushed under speeding cars with enough regularity to belie the "softcore" status of these films. Along with these sex-and-drug raunch operas, Milligan also found the time to do the gorefests for which he is known today.

While he seldom strayed far from William Mishkin, Milligan made three films for another sleaze king named Jerry Balsam. *The Degenerates* was shot in New York City. *The Depraved* dealt with the survivors of a nuclear war in the year 2000; it was made in Woodstock, later to be known for more historic events. *The Ghastly Ones* is Milligan's first known period piece, set in Victorian times and filmed on Staten Island.

If not the best of Milligan's work, *The Ghastly Ones* surely ranks as one of his most brutal. Three sisters and their husbands gather on Crenshaw Island for the Reading Of The Will - Device #1 for getting sixheaded victims within the reach of a madman. In the bloody pre-credits sequence, a hunchbacked retardate named Colin Trask murders and mutilates two extraneous lovebirds who blunder onto the island. The gorefest as a whole boasts hanging, beheading, a pitchfork through the throat, eyeball-yanking, some hand-lobbing and leg-chopping, a meat cleaver in the head, and good old-fashioned disembowelment. One scene, which outraged Stephen King of all people, details one hapless character's bisection by handsaw. In another brief but fairly effective scene, the principals sit down to dinner and an unwitting servant uncovers a severed head reposing on the turkey platter. This set-piece was rather popular in exploitation quarters; Del Tenney started it in *Curse of the Living Corpse* and Carl Mowton later reprised it in the similarly plotted *Blood Legacy*.

Despite his pre-credits peccadilloes one can almost pity Colin Trask. Certainly no actor would envy Had Borske who plays him. The hunchback is subjected to enough brutal beatings to turn ten men into half-wits. He is also hacked on the back with Milligan's pet weapon, the meat cleaver, and is ultimately set afire. In one of the film's high points, Colin chows

down on the belly of a dead rabbit. Whatever pocket change he made off this picture, Borske certainly earned. This onscreen abuse of mental and physical cripples occurs frequently in the Milligan pantheon and represents the blackest side of his work. Whether this is imagery from his own experience or merely a cheap gross-out, only Andy Milligan can say.

The Ghastly Ones was a real backyard movie since it was made in a Victorian house that Milligan owned in 1967. The first murder is amusing, due either to bad sound editing or the limitations of the Auricon. As Colin slices and dices his first victim, Milligan's voice can be heard giving direction in the background. There are some editing gaffes to contend with, along with the fact that the actors, except for Borske, are on par with *Blood Feast*'s Connie Mason. With all its faults, this movie is still a treat for inveterate sleazefiends like the author of this article. *The Ghastly Ones* is now out of print video-wise but you may still be able to find a copy on the rental racks. Please your fellow trash freaks and appall your friends who enjoy normal motion pictures.

After some bitter business squabbles with Balsam, in which Jerry allegedly took Andy to the cleaners, Milligan rejoined his old buddy Will Mishkin. This team produced an unreleased film called *Nightbirds*; Milligan is quite proud of the fact that this black-and-white horror was filmed on the former killing-ground of Jack the Ripper. Mishkin, in fact, produced the most enduring of Milligan's works. A classic case is *Torture Dungeon*, set in the Middle Ages and shot on Staten Island - an oddball combination if ever there was one.

Torture Dungeon is rife with beheading, vivid stabbing, crucifixion, ye olde pitchforks in the throats, sexual perversion and a mob of pseudo-Saxon Staten Islanders. The pivotal figure is the Duke of Norwich (Jeremy Brooks) who divides his time between unnatural fornication and the killing of anyone who stands between him and the throne of the realm. The realm is a plague-ridden, flea-bitten kingdom with a population of about 17,

so why the Duke wants it is a mystery. Maybe it's because the noble and the peasants are all on a first-name basis, which makes the serfs easy to keep track of. This includes the pair of black-clad, hooded headsmen who do the Duke's dirty work, such as nailing people to the doors of modern-day barns and skewering them with short-handled pitchforks straight out of Tru-Value hardware. One of the offending nobles slated for execution is the over-popular Haal Boeske. This man, for all I know, may be a flaming genius in reality, but Milligan once more casts him as the sort of dull-witted, bug-eating, nose-picking geek that would be a successful punk rock musician today. Actual dungeon footage is limited to about two minutes in somebody's redressed basement, but showcases some good Milligan-applied gore effects. Also worth watching is a deformed old hag who holds a secret grudge against the Duke. On the minus side are the extraneous segments dealing with the Duke's bedroom antics, and some needless dialogues that add nothing to the story. Knowing Mishkin, who had a fetish for 80-minute running times, the dialogues were probably filmed to pad the movie out. The most tasteless scene involves the perversions of the Duke's depraved hunchback servant, Ivan, who winds up with a pitchfork through his crooked little spine. This won't win any points with the Hunchback Anti-Defamation League, but it's one of the brighter spots in an otherwise uninspired film. Another hoot is the sound of automobile engines in the background during the opening execution. However, in spite of its excess wordage, overall buffoonery and obvious poverty, *Torture Dungeon* is not a total waste. It's also, no doubt, the best Medieval melodrama shot on Staten Island in 1969.

Fortunately for bargain-basement bloodhounds everywhere Milligan's best was yet to come.

Bloodthirsty Butchers and *The Man With Two Heads* are two of Milligan's better efforts. They were filmed in London with predominantly British casts, and they look much more authentic than any-

thing he made on Staten Island. Hopefully, Milligan's airfare didn't come out of his already microscopic budgets.

Bloodthirsty Butchers, Milligan's best known horror film, purports to tell the true story of Sweeney Todd. I don't know how true it is, but it's a bigger blast to sit through than the windy BBC version of the same story. Despite a lapsing British accent, John Miranda is quite good in the role of the nutso Fleet Street barber who kills and robs his customers before turning the dead meat over to baker Maggie Lovett (Jane Hilary) and sadistic butcher Tobias Ragg, played by Milligan regular Berwick Kaler. The stiffies are turned into meatpies and sold to the populace, most of whom are unaware of what they're digging into at dinner time. However, Lovett also has a select clientele of ghouls who order various "special parts" between the fluted crusts. The real fun begins when a special pie containing a severed human breast is accidentally sold to the biggest blabbermouth on Fleet Street. Rampant sex and adultery are Milligan's breaks between gastronomic strolchies, with Todd and Ragg hanging away with virtually every woman in sight.

Butchers is not all that bad, but it gets off to a rather rocky start. Establishing shots of actors in period costume catch some modern buildings and a real estate sign in the background. The hero sports a Tommy Roe haircut. Todd, swiping a dead victim's ruby ring, hacks off an obvious rubber finger. Once this initial foolishness is dispensed with, however, *Bloodthirsty Butchers* is one entertaining piece of Grand Guignol. It's certainly better than one would expect from the writing team of Milligan and Haal Boeske's brother John, who previously dazzled us with *Torture Dungeon*. Miranda and Kaler ham it up a bit, which is just fine in an outrageous feature like this. Heroine Annabella Wood, who later surfaced in *The House That Vanished*, undermines her sexiness with a certain degree of vapidty. Jane Hilary plays Mrs. Lovett in a straightforward and straight-faced fashion, as if turning schlepps into shepherd's pies was the most natural thing

in the world. Which brings us to the film's main reason for being - the gore.

A bowel-scooping pictured in *Demonique #4* was apparently censored from the Midnight Video print I own, quite amazing considering what remains. As well as the lopped-off breast, there are sundry stranglings and stabbings, decapitation, dismemberment, throat-slicing, torture and the old-cleaver-in-the-skull routine, reprised from *The Ghastly Ones*. The cutting up of Mrs. Todd's freshly killed and still twitching cadaver is especially nasty. In other words, *Blood-thirsty Butchers* does a fine job of living up to its title. Forget the buttered popcorn - heat up some Swanson's meat pies for this one.

Another winner is *The Man With Two Heads*, known more appropriately in Britain as *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Blood*. In some ways this is the best Milligan shocker I've seen, misleading title aside. That was cooked up by Mishkin to jump on 1971's *Thing With Two Heads/Incredible Two-Headed Transplant* bandwagon. In reality, this is a fairly straightforward retelling of the Jekyll and Hyde story.

This time, an obscure thespian named Denis DeMorne plays the pioneering doctor who downs a lethal elixir and mutates into a perverted criminal. Of course, Milligan brought to the fore all the gore, sadism and debauchery merely hinted at in more respectable renditions, as Jekyll's evil alter ego fixates on a lackless East End prostitute.

Milligan directed, photographed, did costumes and constructed sets on this movie with a crew of about five - his usual operating procedure. He also wrote the script without collaboration from anyone else. No reflection on John Borske or Hal Sherwood, who co-authored *The Ghastly Ones*, but maybe Milligan should have done all his own writing. *The Man With Two Heads* proceeds smoothly and rapidly with no padding, draggy dialogue or serious continuity flubs in evidence. Some of Jekyll's scientific teachings are a complete crock, but for some suspension of disbelief is a must for this type of whacked-out horror film. The fact that DeMorne delivers the far-fetched lines without cracking up is further evidence of his great acting ability. In fact, along with



Bloodthirsty BUTCHERS

Jane Hilary (later seen in the British sitcom *Good Neighbors*), DeMarnie is probably the best actor Milligan ever directed.

The other acting is average or better, with April Connors and Gay Feld convincing in their parts. *Torture Dungeon's* Jeremy Brooks plays an incensed medical student. In spite of the singularly menacing appearance that made him a natural Tobias Ragg, Berwick Kaler is cast as a good guy this time. He plays Jack Smathers, Jekyll's well-meaning assistant who spills his guts. Literally. All over his living room floor.

Speaking of guts, one wonder why this nearly unknown melodrama didn't achieve more notoriety on entrails alone. It contains not one but three eviscerations, an equal number of beheadings, savage beatings, corpse vivisection and a nearly surreal torture sequence. Allowing for the limitations of time, money and material the gore is really good this time around. The grainy 16 mm blow-up photography adds a documentary look to the whole bloody business. This is a must for fans of obscure low-budget horror - and about as obscure, low-budget and horrific as you can get.

Of more dubious value is Milligan's hybrid movie *The Rats Are Coming! The Werewolves Are Here!* I didn't believe that title the first time I saw it, either. This film started out as *Curse of the Full Moon*, the story of an in-fighting family of lycanthropes. Not happy with the 75 minute running time and eager to cash in on *Willard*, Mishkin ordered Milligan to film about 20 minutes of killerrat footage when he got back to Staten Island and splice it into his werewolf tale. This extraneous scenery boasts a Dickens-quoting rodent salesman who has had his face chewed half off; he eventually is burned alive. Uncut prints of this oddity supposedly contained a goodly amount of gore and grue. Midnight Video, not the swiftest outfit in the world, struck their VHS and Beta prints from a TV version with most of the good stuff cut out. Still, in any form, this picture is a real howler, even by Milligan standards.

In the early 1970s, Milligan formed his own company, Nova, which was responsible for the charming double-bill *The Body Beneath* and *Guru the Mad Monk*. Having already stuck my neck out by saying some nice things about Milligan, I will now make like a giraffe and say that *The Body Beneath* is one fine piece of work. By setting the atmospheric story of Reverend Ford and his vampire cult in modern times, Milligan apparently cut the cost of costuming every actor and invested some real money in the film's finale. The red-filtered eating orgy held by the vampire tribe in London's Highgate Cemetery is a minor masterpiece. (I won't say what they are eating, but it wasn't a jar of Planters Peanuts.) At one point, Milligan and his cohorts were thrown out of Highgate for not having work permits. While one person distracted the caretaker, the others hopped the back wall and started filming again. *The Body Beneath* was definitely worth the trouble. (Not long ago, another horror fan showed me a book dealing with vampire films. It said that around 1970, there were witchcraft rituals held at Highgate, and one ruined chapel was found littered with the trappings of devil worship. I can't help but wonder)

Guru was filmed in Saint Peter's Church in Manhattan. This one has the titular mad priest, his vampire mistress and a humpbacked servant - Igor, no less - raising hell on a European prison island in the 1400s. Neil Flanagan, another *Torture Dungeon* veteran, emotes as Father Guru. This hour-long wonder was Milligan's first film in 35 mm and is especially notorious for the glimpses of modern scenery that often found their way into Andy's home-grown horrors. It is also reported to be one of the most gratuitous hours in exploitation history, as Guru tortures young women, then sits in his confessional drinking their blood. Naturally, I'm going to see this one the first chance I get.

At that point, the honeymoon was apparently over between Mishkin and his tireless hired gun. Some reference books

credit a man named Walter Kent as producer of Milligan's next shock-fest, *Blood!*, while others give that honor to the infamous Gerard (*Deep Throat*) Damiano. Distributed in 1973 by the late Brynastone Pictures, *Blood* had a gargantuan budget of \$20,000. This cocker featured an arranged marriage between the Wolf Man's son and Dracula's daughter. Supporting characters include man-eating plants and some Igor-style lab assistants. The central character played by Allen Berendt suffers from lycanthropy induced by rage rather than the full moon. Hope (*Rare Werewolves*) Starbury co-starred. As far as I'm concerned, this little piece of weirdness can't make it to domestic home video fast enough.

In 1978, Milligan remade *The Ghastly Ones* for Ken Lane Films. The retread was called *Legacy of Horror* or *Legacy of Blood*, not to be confused with a Carl Monson movie of similar title. This is one Milligan movie even I can't stand. Unlike the original, this has none of the fast pacing or picturesque characters or explicit mayhem that made *The Ghastly Ones* a Looney-Tune for gorehounds. A Milligan film with no blood is about as good as a Russ Meyer film with no bared bazoomies. Still, *Legacy of Horror* makes the rest of the Milligan pantheon look like solid gold by comparison. It's also the only Milligan film I've seen that deserves the brickbats thrown at his work as a whole.

Milligan ran an off-Broadway playhouse in the early 1980s but kept his bloody hand in with such efforts as *Fever*, *The House of Seven Belles* and *Carnage*. The latter was produced by Will Mishkin's son, Lewis who wasn't quite as tight with the shekels as dear old dad. Filmed in 1983, this ultra-violent haunted house chiller has a number of borderline yuppie-types slaughtered by the ghosts of a bride and groom who died in a murder-suicide pact. Objects move and float convincingly about, often with fatal results. There is a bathtub electrocution; the impalement, dismemberment and disembowelment of two burglars; beheading, and the

sight of a cleaver buried in the head of a hapless priest. This fun, at least, awaited the video release of *Carnage* with bated breath. Unlike *Legacy of Horror*, this astounding feature was well worth the wait.

In the late 1980s, Milligan abruptly migrated to California where he directed the Lew Mishkin-produced *Monstrosity*, starring none other than Hal Borke. Other West Coast wonders include *The Weirdo*, *Menage* and *Surgikill*. Of these, only *The Weirdo* has surfaced on video so far. This time, a stuttering teenage whipping-boy gets as mad as hell, decides not to take it anymore and offs his oppressors before his own awful death. The bad guys include punked-out bully-boys, evil social workers, a wicked stepmother and a lecherous pastor and his stupid wife. The cleaver carnage, live burning, impalement, electrocution and other delights are underscored by the nerd's doomed romance with the local handicapped girl. They're also undermined by some chintzy gore effects that don't quite measure up to the outrages in *Carnage*. Hints abounded at the beginning and end that *Weirdo II* was imminent, but then the Grim Reaper stepped in.

Given Milligan's considerable output - I often pictured him collapsing from exhaustion, script in one hand and camera in the other, falling dead on a pile of meat cleavers, animal innards, and hand-tailored Victorian suits and dresses. I never thought it would end the way it did.

Homosexuals, drug abusers and over-sexed characters turned up frequently in Milligan's pictures. Apparently the artist imitated his art, or vice versa. Last year, the 62-year old cult director died of the same four-letter disease that also claimed the lives of Rock Hudson, John Holmes, Brad Davis, Chuck Vincent and Ian Charleson.

I'm not going to judge the man for indulging in some life-style totally alien to my own. Nor am I going to canonize him; if he died a thousand times, *Legacy of Horror* would still stink like Limburger on a hot manifold. I will say that his other

work has provided hours of entertainment for this fan and a small following of others. Like Blind Robins, pickled eggs and Guinness Stout, Milligan films are hated by many, and a taste acquired by

few. None can deny that Andy Milligan was one of the most bizarre directors who ever picked up a camera. For better or worse, we may never see his like again. ●



Art by David Miller

GORE SCOREBOARD

FANGS (1992)

d: Bruce G. Hallenbeck



2

Looking at this homegrown homage to bloodsuckers, one gets the impression that writer - director Hallenbeck was exposed to *Horror of Dracula* at age five and hasn't been the same since. Hosted and narrated by beautiful Veronica (*Dracula Has Risen from the Grave*) Carlson, this sixty-minute overview of Vampire Cinema takes us from silent shockers to modern mayhem. Carlson's narration, some Porry Ackermanesque puns notwithstanding, is nearly as entertaining as accompanying clips from the Schreck and Kinski *Noferatu's*, Franco's *Count Dracula*, the watershed Hammer horrors, *Count Dracula's Great Love* and *The Lost Boys* to name a few. (You can only cram so much into an hour; I suppose that explains the conspicuous omission of *Vampire Hookers* and *Invasion of the Blood Farmers*.) Available trailers were fairly anemic - hence the low Gore Score - but certain represented flicks like *Scars of Dracula* and *The Vampire Lovers* are worth a few gallons of the warm Deep Red stuff. Sink your fangs into this one as soon as it hits the rental racks.

(WG)

VOICES FROM BEYOND (1991)

d: Lucio Fulci



7

Patrick Swayze in *Ghost* showed us how a dead man might react to his own assassination. Del Prete, killed by a member of his family, seeks vengeance from the grave, and Huff, his daughter helps him in the task. Unlike *Ghost*, though, Fulci makes

no space for sentimentalism, giving his lead character a nasty and vengeful nature.

Financial tycoon Giorgia Mainardi dies under mysterious circumstances, leaving his family with a considerable amount of money. Not at all happy with his premature death, the defunct raises hell, giving the gorgeous Huff more than one reason to kill and destroy.

Shot in less than three weeks with an extremely low budget, *Voices From Beyond* gets two thumbs down for ridiculous acting and poor technique. On the other hand, a couple of great splatter scenes make it quite worthwhile; the zombies are back in a well-shot nightmare sequence, and the film starts off with a brutal and realistic autopsy.

The film is dedicated to Clive Barker and Claudio Carabba; probably the only film journalist, along with Chas. Balun who still shows some respect for the works of the Italian maestro.

(LC)

THE RAPTURE (1991)

d: Michael Tolkin



2

Mimi Rogers plays Sharon, a bored Los Angeles switchboard operator taken to prowling singles bars with her British boyfriend Vic for other dissolute couples. Sharon is looking for something, anything to give her life meaning. Sinister fundamentalist bike-riding Christians (Mormons?) appear at her door to give her the Good News about the Son of Man's imminent return. Forsaking her swinging single life-style, she falls into a cult of people at work who follow the teachings of a young black boy who feeds them visions of approaching Armageddon. Married to a

Greg Goodell (GG), Shane M. Dallmann (SMD), Walter Gay (WG), Loris Carci (LC)

former swing partner with their precocious six-year old little girl in a suburban tract home, Sharon would seem to be a glowing testimonial for Pat Robertson's *700 Club* until a distraught co-worker shoots her husband dead one fateful day. Seeing his likeness beckoning to her from a desert formation from some photos rolling off a photo processing machine, she gathers her little girl to the desert to await the Second Coming. The two wait for weeks, encamped in their tent and car, growing hungrier and more filthy until the little girl begs her mother to kill her so she can meet her daddy in Heaven. Obliging the tyke with a gun to the temple, Sharon cannot bring herself to suicide and bitterly renounces Christianity. Picked up by the police, the disillusioned Sharon is taken to a nearby jail

. . . . and then *The Rapture* comes.

So much horror iconography is Catholic; priests, nuns and demonic possession. Precious little has been done with Protestant fundamentalist angst. The cultists shown in *The Rapture* are infinitely more horrifying than the Satanists in *The Seventh Victim* and *Rosemary's Baby*. Endlessly smiling, enlisting children in their own abuse, waiting for the day that all those who do not share their particular beliefs will be horribly destroyed.

The only other film in *The Rapture's* ballpark is *The Seventh Seal*, a special-effects-full bum fart of a film that ignored the many frightening implications concerning Biblical prophecy.

If you've ever been made to go to Sunday School against your will, been spooked by a religious tract left under a cocktail napkin, watched deranged television preachers on nights you

can't sleep, *The Rapture* will terrify you in a way that no other film has been able to do. Part of this is due to the sunny, bland look of the film that could have come from a Billy Graham testimonial picture; the only assurance that *The Rapture* is not a sinister born-again tirade is some steamy R-rated sex in the first twenty minutes. The final shot is a shattering jack boot to the genitals that will leave the viewer gasping for air. Had New Line Cinema put *The Rapture* in half the theaters they dumped *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* that studio's reputation would have certainly been redeemed. I have purposefully left out some plot details as to not detract from *The Rapture's* overall cinematic effect; verily, I say unto you to go join the cult that is rapidly growing around this low-budget masterpiece!

(GG)

DOOR TO SILENCE

(1991)

d: H. Simon Kittay (Lucio Fulci)



Fulci's (the pseudonym was an idea of producer D'Amato) latest is an odd, out-of-the genre one man show, starring ex-star John Savage. The film, on which Aristide Massaccesi didn't feel like risking much, is a low budget bore filmed in Louisiana, and it lacks the director's usual gory stuff, representing instead a less spectacular vision of his life-after-death trademark. Savage looks particularly confused playing the role of a wealthy business man who dies in a car accident. Actually, none of this is on the screen. All we get to see is the victim attempting and failing to find his way back home from the land of the dead.

Fulci gives his star an improbable script to work on, and it shows . . . *Door To Silence* has no plot whatsoever, making it difficult for Savage to prove he still has some acting skills. Although the film is an adaptation of a short story Lacro wrote approximately eight years ago, it is not difficult to spot similarities with Adrianne Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder* to which of course, Fulci's film is in debt of originality. Most of all, the film is indebted to former in technique. Director of photography Luigi Ciccarese (*Demonia*) destroys what little suspense Fulci manages to set up; no wonder Vincent Dawn considers him his pet photographer . . .

All in all, *Door To Silence* is still better than *Voices From Beyond* and the Gothic *Demonia*, but nostalgic gore fans should go back and rerun his old films instead.

(LC)

THE SPIDER LABYRINTH (1988)

d: Gianfranco Giagni



For serious fans, the name of the game when it comes to Euro-shockers is locating the most complete versions possible. Nevertheless, Americans developed an interest in Argento, Fulci, Naschy and the other collector's targets in the first place because their films, cut or not, got theatrical play in this country on a decent, if not extravagant scale. Things aren't that easy anymore. You won't be able to get acquainted with Gianfranco Giagni and *The Spider Labyrinth* unless you or someone you know has access to imported Japanese laserdiscs, as no other release of this title is yet available. That's a shame, because Giagni unquestionably warrants keeping an eye on.

This is a very curious blend of an Argento-style murder mystery and a plunge into Fulci's gruesome netherworlds. The combination could easily become an absolute muddle (check out Sergio Martino's *The Scorpion With Two Tails*, for example), but Giagni demonstrates a smooth, fluid control. The story concerns an American professor sent to Budapest to aid in the investigation of a cryptic stone recently unearthed there. When people start turning up dead in mysterious circumstances, our protagonist finds himself drawn slowly into a deadly web (both metaphorical and literal), involving elements ranging from an unforgettable screeching assassin to a climactic array of Sergio Stivaletti effects. If you sense I'm trying not to give too much away, you're dead on the money. Suffice it to say that even though the protagonist suffers the same titular affliction due to a similar childhood trauma, don't expect anything along the lines of *Arachnophobia*. At once comfortable familiar and strikingly unique, *The Spider Labyrinth* is worth the extra effort it will take to find (especially this letterboxed print). Let me be the first to offer Giagni a warm welcome. Good to have you with us.

(SMD)

THE ART OF DYING (1991)

d: Wings Hauser



With some help from a slimy pimp, a perverted serial killer duplicates famous screen deaths on film using real victims. Oaf detective Wings Hauser teams up with midget Michael J. Pollard to stop the killings; this Mut-and-Jeff clown team seems incapable of catching a head cold so there's some real suspense concerning whether they'll actually get close

to the murderer. Kathleen Kinmont is on hand to make sure all goes well in the Big-Boobed Blimbo Department. Sarah Douglas, who even swears with flair, adds a touch of class to a film that sorely needs it. The subtle wit of *The Art of Dying* is best exemplified by a scene in which a police captain tells Hauser "I'm gonna put my foot so far up your ass your breath'll smell like shoe polish!" At least the killer's reenactments (including the shower scene from *Psycho*, the double chainsaw murder from *Scarface* and *The Deer Hunter's* Russian Roulette number) are splashy and splattery and one of them is even more moist and meaty than the original. In between butcheries, *The Art of Dying* clanks along something terrible and you'll appreciate your Fast Forward button more than ever. From those slap-happy sleazemongers Richard Pepin and Joseph Merhi, formerly of City Lights Home Video. (WG)

RABID GRANNIES (1987) d; Emmanuel Kervyn Uncut version



R-Rated version



You may think I'm exaggerating the respective ratings a bit, but I can think of no recent point that requires such a vivid illustration. Troma Films deserves high marks for acquiring some extremely worthwhile foreign films, true. And the creation of a safe "R" version seems to be a necessary evil these days. But you usually get a choice, don't you? Troma only released one version of this film on video. Guess which one.

Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* films, especially Part 2, blended high gore

with raucous slapstick comedy in *The Three Stooges* style. If the comic inspiration had been a farce of manners such as 1936's *My Man Godfrey*, you'd have something closer to Kervyn's offering. This Belgian production gathers the cream of high society together to pay birthday tribute to their matriarch (technically an "auntie," not a "granny.") But an estranged relative sneaks a surprise gift to the party - an antique box containing lethally possessive spirits which quickly infect the birthday girl and her sister.

Even if you feel you've seen it all when it comes to hard gore (we sure did), the antics of the demon aunts in the uncut version will have you howling. That explains the difference in my gore rating - but how does that improve the film so much on the quality scale? The "R" print, which I saw first, comes off as an excruciating gabfest. But the gore and action contribute so much to the rhythm of the film that it puts you in a much more receptive mood to appreciate the well-written characters and the vicious satire involved. Kervyn's no hack - he really cared about the film he was making - and his audiences deserves no less than the full version. Troma has it. Let's get together and demand that they share it.

(SMD)

EMPEROR CALIGULA: THE UNTOLD STORY (1987)

d; Joe D'Amato



David Cain excels as Gaius Caesar Germanicus, better known as Caligula, who commits every sin under the sun until coming to a bad end. Laura Gemser is a plotter who

wants to kill him and make the world a safer place for her fellow Christians - and everyone else. Senator Gabriele Tinti also plots against the emperor and gets a spear suppository in a scene guaranteed to make the average spinchterpucker shut for a month. Other delights include bloody deflorations, infanticide, a boxing match with spiked gloves, sundry stabbings and slashings and a tongue-cutting that makes the lapper laceration in *Blood Feast* look like a clip from *Mister Rogers*. Straight and deviant sex, stopping just short of actual penetrations, are director D'Amato's breaks between bloodlettings; some prints are rumored to contain hardcore inserts. The film is as well-made as it is excessive. It's also full of such florid dialogue as "I could have written my masterpiece in your blood, Caligula!" and "My wine is better guarded than your wives' private parts." Uh-huh. The flick looks fairly lavish on a low budget and maintains interest throughout which is more than can be said for the overblown Tinto Brass *Caligula*. Required viewing for iron-stomached fans of the glory that was Rome.

(WG)

CHAIN GANG WOMEN (1971)

d: Lee Frost



A small-time pot pusher and a cold-blooded murderer are chained together on a rural work gang. After a slow first half - cliched to the point of having one jailbird playing a harmonica - the criminal Odd Couple breaks out and begins robbing its way across the countryside. They finally break their chains and for some reason, still stick together. The murderer

adds a couple of rapes to his repertoire before the aging husband of one young victim sets out for revenge on both convicts. Good premise, lousy execution. Michael Steans as the lecherous murderer is convincing but no one else in the cast can act their way out of a paper bag. The flick is so lame that the most heinous crime fail to generate more than a yawn. I don't know which is worse - the lousy prison songs or the ludicrous sight of the fat septuagenarian husband strangling big muscular Steans to death with his bare hands. The "army of police" mentioned on the video box consists of about ten stupid officers who couldn't cut it at a Keystone Kops Konvention. The blood is strictly of the "slapped-on" variety; the death of one convict takes place offscreen. Blame Academy Video, with their fetish for renaming films, for the misleading title. If you *must* see a Wes Bishop/Lee Frost flick, check out *Black Gestapo* instead.

(WG)

CAIN'S CUTTHROATS (1970)

d: Kent Osborne



Also known as *Cain's Way* and *The Blood Seekers*, this is a grungy, trashy Western starring and produced by alumni of Al Adamson pictures. Confederate Scott Brady goes after his former Rebel raiders after they rape his wife, murder his son and leave him for dead. He is helped by the ubiquitous John Carradine in one of his weirdest roles: a Bible-spouting bounty hunter who hacks off the raiders' heads, offscreen, before pickling them in salt-brine. There are blood squibs, blasted heads and blown-up bodies aplenty in the first

half, growing tedium in the second, punctuated by bursts of doofoid dialogue. A lack of continuity at the very end makes one wonder if Video Gems didn't drop a reel in the transfer. Some theatrical prints had footage of modern bikers on the rampage intercut, for no good reason. *The Outlaw Josey Wales* and a few other sagebrush successes notwithstanding, Hollywood was taking a dim view of Westerns in the 1970s. Take a look at this howler and find out why.

(WG)

THE DARK BACKWARD (1991)

d: Adam Rifkin



Judd Nelson is Marty Malt, the world's unfunniest comedian. When he grows a third arm out of his back for no explicable reason one day, his best friend and co-worker Gus the Garbage Man (the redoubtable, always welcome Bill Paxton) seeks to play it up as a hot gimmick. Not only does the third arm fail to make any impact, talent agents are only interested in Gus' accordion-playing accompaniment. This paper-thin little premise stretched over for more than 100 minutes comprises this "kooky cult comedy" that, natch, steals all of its ideas from John Waters and David Lynch.

The Dark Backward was cited in an Associated Press news release in the failure of films to attract audiences in 1991; according to the figures given, less than four thousand people paid to see *The Dark Backward* when it played repertory theaters and midnight shows. It shouldn't take any sort of marketing degree to figure out why - a comedy that is on purpose, not funny.

Set in a alternate universe strewn with trash and bizarre characters, the film mixes in Tim Burton, Waters and Lynch into a tasteless puree that makes the similarly concocted *Meet the Hollowheads* (1989) seem like a masterpiece in comparison. There is much grotesquerie involved, the film's humor stemming from an "upchuck" level; necrophilia, obese women, gross wounds and slimy surroundings. But even here, the effect lacks integrity. When Divine goggled dogshit in *Pink Flamingos*, the camera dutifully recorded the cur performing the act as Divine anxiously lapped it up in a single take. When Paxton slurps up a bowl of black slop, it's just Tony Gardener's Alterian Studio's technicians at work.

An irritating, tiresome exercise at pandering to what the filmmakers consider a hip, underground audience, *The Dark Backward* is ample evidence of *Film Threat* magazine's creative bankruptcy (Rifkin and Chris Gore are close buddies). It rates its half-skull from a brilliantly vicious Tom and Jerry cartoon quoted off a TV screen that lasts all of twenty seconds. *Fuck this shit!*

(GG)



CHRISTOPHER LEE in

TECHNICOLOR
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THE REFLECTING SKIN (1990)

d: Phillip Ridley



Winsome tyke Seth Dove (Jeremy Cooper) is a disturbed little boy with more than his share of problems. Living in an unspecified Midwestern prairie town in 1950s America, his immediate family more than defines the term "dysfunctional." His father is a closet homosexual, his mother is an abusive witch, his older brother is dying from radiation poisoning incurred while as a G.I. during Pacific Island atomic tests (the "reflecting skin" of the title), and all of his playmates are being spirited away and murdered by sinister child molesters in black leather jackets. Worse yet is the nagging suspicion that Seth feels that his next door neighbor is a vampire (Lindsay Duncan, the supercilious mad scientist from *Body Parts*) with evil intent on his older brother and that the one-eyed town sheriff has wicked designs on the surviving members of his family. Most horrifying of all is the inescapable feeling that Seth and his friends and family are trapped in a *gasp* *art film*, one where the director has chosen to over-direct, instructed his performers to over-act (as well as wear depressingly "Goth" black clothing in the dead of summer), his photographer to over-photograph, and give all of his character silly-ass "poetic" names like "Seth Dove." It's no wonder the only respite these poor wretches have is to slap their hands to their faces and bellow "AAAAAaaaaaaarrggghh" in *Home Alone* fashion. They do so, often at inopportune times.

The Reflecting Skin attempts to translate the traumas of childhood in

a disturbing, poetic fashion but fails mightily. The script piles on atrocity after atrocity in such a ham-fisted manner most viewers will snort with derisive laughter at the characters' misfortune. When all of the above mentioned woe occurs in the first thirty minutes (this is before the part where Seth discovers an aborted fetus in the barn and keeps it in a box under his bed and a local hayseed preacher confesses to erotic dreams involving his goat), audiences will wonder if they've accidentally stumbled into a feature-length Carol Burnett old-time Melodrama parody by mistake. The film tries so hard and overshoots its mark by miles over and over again, combined with a "broomstick-wedged-up-its-ass" seriousness, *Skin* emerges as camp of the highest sort. *The Reflecting Skin* is successful only in making viewers laugh at previously taboo subjects in its massive parade of horrors - murder, sexual abuse, death, suicide, and torture - unintentionally.

The only viewers I imagine *The Reflecting Skin* would impress would be those swayed by its arthouse sheen and lofty aspirations. I suspect anybody who would declare it a "break-through effort" to be fulla it. Most intriguing is the tagline attributed to Roger Ebert of *Siskel and Ebert* fame that adorns the film's video box: "It reminded me of *Blue Velvet* and the other works of David Lynch, but I think it's better" Than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick? Than sliding down a staircase that abruptly transforms into a giant razor blade? An example of an extraordinary amount of excrement jammed into an exceedingly small receptacle, *Skin* is that rare breed of motion picture, a Palme D'Or candidate that can be enjoyed sheerly on the level of a *Blood Freak* or *Plan Nine from Outer Space*. (GG)

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